

# SOVEREIGNTY

BY MARY KATHRYN NAGLE

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Power Plays Initiative

Molly Smith, Artistic Director and Edgar Dobie, Executive Director

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### **Cast (9 Actors Total)**

SOVEREIGNTY takes place in the early 1800s and in the future. We transition back and forth in time fluidly, quickly, and consequently, the costumes and set should not be fully realized in either “time period.” The worlds co-exist, since at any given moment, we are a reflection of our past and present, and we project that into our future.

Nine actors (7 M, 2 W) play all the roles in the following tracks:

1800s/Future

- o John Ridge
- o Sarah Polson
- o Major Ridge / Roger Ridge Polson (Sarah's father)
- o Elias Boudinot / Watie (Sarah's brother)
- o John Ross / Jim Ross
- o Andrew Jackson / Ben (Sarah's fiancé)
- o Samuel Worcester / Mitch (Sarah's childhood friend)
- o Sally (Sarah Bird Northrup) / Flora Ridge (Sarah's Cousin)
- o White Chorus Man / White Chorus Man

Character Descriptions:

**John Ridge (1800s):** the son of Major Ridge, John Ridge was an influential leader in the Cherokee Nation in the 1820s and 30s until he was assassinated in 1839. He served as Clerk to the Cherokee Nation National Committee (the Council). Signed the Treaty of New Echota in 1835. Husband of Sally (Sarah Bird Northrup).

**Sarah Polson (today):** Direct descendant of Major Ridge, Sally and John Ridge. Sister to Watie. Cousin to Flora. Sarah is a graduate of Yale Law School and citizen of Cherokee Nation. She returns home to Cherokee Nation after a long absence.

**Major Ridge (1800s):** Given the title “Major” after fighting with General Andrew Jackson in the War of 1812, Major Ridge was a very influential leader in Cherokee Nation politics in the 1810s, 20s, and 30s, until he was assassinated in 1839. He is the father of John Ridge and uncle of Elias Boudinot. He served many years as the Speaker of the Cherokee Nation Council, and as Chief John Ross's assistant, until the divide that takes place in this play. Signed the Treaty of New Echota in 1835.

**Roger (Ridge) Polson (today):** Direct descendant of Major Ridge, Sally, and John Ridge, father of Sarah Polson and Watie Smith. Uncle to Flora.

**Elias Boudinot (1800s):** John Ridge's cousin. His father is Major Ridge's brother. Elias Boudinot went to Cornwall for school with his cousin John and then returned home to Cherokee Nation and became the first Editor of the Cherokee Phoenix, the first printed paper of an Indian Nation. Signed the Treaty of New Echota in 1835.

**Watie (today):** Direct descendant of Major Ridge, Sally, and John Ridge. He is Sarah's brother and Roger Ridge Polson's son. Cousin to Flora. Watie works for the Cherokee Nation Police Force.

**John Ross (1800s):** Chief of Cherokee Nation from 1828 until his death in the 1860s. Led the Cherokee Nation through significant turmoil, including the removal and the Civil War. He is revered by Cherokees today as one of the most important Cherokee leaders of all times.

**Jim Ross (today):** Direct descendant of John Ross. Jim is Sarah's boss in the Attorney General's office.

**Andrew Jackson (1800s):** an American soldier and statesman who served as President of the United States from 1829 to 1837. He believed Indians were an inferior race that should disappear from the face of the Earth.

**Ben (today):** Special Victims Unit Police Officer in present day Oklahoma. He becomes Sarah's fiancé. He is non-Indian.

**Samuel Worcester (1800s):** White man, missionary who goes to live in Cherokee Nation. He worked with Elias to translate the Bible into Cherokee. His arrest in 1832 sparked one of the most significant cases in United States history in the Supreme Court: *Worcester v. Georgia*.

**Mitch (today):** Modern day lawyer, non-Indian, living in Oklahoma. Childhood friend of Sarah and Watie.

**Sally (Given name: Sarah Bird Northrup) (1800s):** John Ridge's wife, and daughter of the schoolmaster in Cornwall, Connecticut. She is non-Indian. Flora, Sarah, Roger, and Watie are all her direct descendants.

**Flora (today):** Direct descendant of Major Ridge, John Ridge, and Sally. Citizen of Cherokee Nation. She runs the family cemetery where Major Ridge and John Ridge are buried, just a few hundred yards from where John was murdered. Roger is her uncle, and Sarah and Watie are her cousins.

**White Chorus Man (1800s and today):** This actor portrays Drunk Man, Father, Georgia Guard, William Wirt, Bartender, and Reverend Schermerhorn.

\* \* \*

## **ACT ONE**

**ONE** 2019. Cherokee Nation Hard Rock Casino, Catoosa, Oklahoma. MITCH and BEN sit at the bar drinking beers.

MITCH

Only once.

BEN

Mmm-hmm.

MITCH

I'm serious.

BEN

You're full of shit.

MITCH

She was hot.

BEN

Lemme see.

MITCH

What?

BEN

A photo.

MITCH

That was 18 years ago.

BEN

Come on man, third grade doesn't count.

MITCH

Fifth. I remember because she was in sixth-

BEN

So you like older women.

MITCH

One year older. We went out.

BEN

Where?

MITCH

It's a phrase. You know, "went out".

BEN

I said have you ever *dated* an Indian-

MITCH

She kissed me. By the swings. At recess.

WATIE enters, in his tribal police uniform, making his rounds on the casino floor.

WATIE

Been an exciting night so far.

MITCH

Yeah?

WATIE

I just got called to the northwest lot to assist a 92 year old in a fender bender with a tree.

MITCH

How do you get into a fender bender with a tree?

WATIE

Exactly. Not to mention the bleach blonde 24 carrot diamond lady puking all over a slot machine in the east wing, or the guy who set his moustache on fire on 9-

MITCH

Take a load off. I'll get you a beer.

WATIE

Can't. Got ten and I'm back on.

BEN

(extends his hand to shake WATIE's) Hey, I'm Ben.

WATIE

Watie.

They shake hands.

MITCH

Sorry- I forget my friends don't know each other. Watie, this is Ben. Ben this is Watie. Watie here went to school with me-

WATIE

We go back-

MITCH

Way back-

WATIE

Like fifth grade back.

BEN

Any friend of Mitch is a friend of mine.

WATIE

Likewise.

**DRUNK MAN** enters, making a beeline for bar.

**DRUNK MAN**

(to WATIE) Outta my way.

WATIE

Excuse me.

**DRUNK MAN**

You deaf? I said outta my way.

MITCH

Hey buddie, this guy here's police. You're talking to a cop.

**DRUNK MAN**

I don't care if I'm talkin' to Jesus. I'ma order a drink.

WATIE

How much have you had to drink tonight, sir?

**DRUNK MAN**

Tell this redskin outta my way.

BEN stands up.

WATIE

(to BEN) I got this.

BEN

He's really drunk.

WATIE

They usually are. (to DRUNK MAN) Sir, I think you've had too much to drink.

DRUNK MAN

I ain't had enough.

WATIE

I'm gonna have to ask you to leave.

DRUNK MAN

I got a right to be here.

MITCH

(to WATIE) Do you need us to move?

WATIE

(to MITCH) You're fine. (to DRUNK MAN) I'm gonna give you to the count of three, and then you'll be escorted out. One.

DRUNK MAN

Fuck you.

WATIE

Two.

DRUNK MAN

You wanna go?

MITCH

Watie-

WATIE

Three-

DRUNK MAN

Aghhhh (*groans and general sounds of agonized, drunken fighting*)

**DRUNK MAN** lunges at WATIE, taking him down. WATIE, aware that he has no jurisdiction, isn't quite sure how to react. **DRUNK MAN** is on top of WATIE and prepares to land another punch when BEN pulls him off and places cuffs on **DRUNK MAN**.

BEN

Sir, you're under arrest. You have the right to remain silent.

WATIE

You're police?

MITCH

Ben's with the State.

BEN

Special victims unit.

BEN flashes his badge.

**DRUNK MAN**

Fuck you man!

BEN

Anything you say can and will be used against you-

WATIE

You can't arrest him.

**DRUNK MAN**

You can't arrest me!

WATIE

This is Cherokee Nation.

**DRUNK MAN**

Fuck Cherokee Nation.

BEN

Shit. You're right. We don't have jurisdiction. (*BEN backs off*) He's all yours.

WATIE

I can't.

**DRUNK MAN**

Lemme go!

BEN

(to DRUNK MAN) SHUT UP! (to WATIE) What do you mean you can't?

WATIE

I'm Tribal Police.

BEN

So arrest him.

DRUNK MAN

Fuckin' hell man!

WATIE

I can't arrest a non-Native who attacks a Native.

BEN

Says who?

WATIE

The Supreme Court.

DRUNK MAN

Yeah. I got rights!

BEN

So you're telling me no one has jurisdiction?

WATIE

The feds. They can arrest him.

BEN

But they aren't here.

WATIE

They never are.

DRUNK MAN

Can I go now?

BEN releases DRUNK MAN who taunts BEN and WATIE and then exits.

BEN

Do you think he'll sue me?

WATIE

You should sue *him*.

BEN

I arrested him. Without sufficient authority. Isn't that like, a constitutional right violation?

WATIE

I dunno. Mitch is the lawyer. I'm just police.

MITCH

I do family law. I don't know shit about the Constitution. I mean, I know we got one-

WATIE

(*in pain*) Ahhhh.

MITCH

Take it easy now.

BEN

Does it hurt?

MITCH

You're gonna have a black eye.

WATIE

I'm fine.

SARAH enters.

SARAH

They said you were making rounds, but I should've known you'd be at the bar- (*she sees his face*) Oh my God. Watie!

WATIE

I'm fine.

SARAH

What happened?

MITCH

He was attacked.

WATIE

I wasn't attacked.

BEN

By a drunk white dude.

WATIE

He got a few punches in and then we let him go.

SARAH

Did you call the Feds?

WATIE

I generally don't do things that waste my time.

SARAH

You need to report this.

WATIE

Name one time the Feds actually showed up.

SARAH

I'll get you some ice-

WATIE

I'm fine-

SARAH

You're bleeding.

WATIE

(*picks up a bar napkin*) I have this napkin.

MITCH

(*to SARAH*) I didn't know you were in town.

SARAH

Hi Mitch.

WATIE

She's moving back.

SARAH

Speaking of which, where are your keys?

WATIE

Under the mat, I left you a key-

SARAH

It doesn't unlock your door.

WATIE

Oh shit, yeah. That's the toolshed.

SARAH

I'm not sleeping in the toolshed.

WATIE

No, probably not.

MITCH

You're moving back?

SARAH

Yeah.

MITCH

To Jay?

WATIE

To Tahlequah. If she can get a job.

SARAH

I'm interviewing to work in the Attorney General's office.

WATIE

She wants to work for a Ross.

SARAH

I want to work for the Cherokee Nation.

MITCH

They'll let you do that?

SARAH

I don't have to tell him I'm a Ridge.

WATIE

Just hide who you are. It's cool, no one will ever know.

SARAH

Do you tell everyone you meet you're a Ridge?

BEN

What's a "Ridge"?

SARAH

See. Your friend here doesn't know you're a Ridge.

WATIE

I met him like five minutes ago.

SARAH

So he's a complete stranger.

MITCH

He's my friend.

WATIE

And he saved my ass.

BEN

I tried. But I couldn't arrest the guy. I'm Police. SVU.

MITCH

Special Victims Unit.

SARAH

I know SVU.

BEN

I was working, you know, in Houston-

MITCH

And they recruited him. The State, to come here, 'cause when it comes to SVU, he's the best.

BEN

(to SARAH) I'm a detective.

SARAH

(to BEN) Do you have a name?

BEN

(extends his hand to SARAH) Ben.

SARAH

Nice to meet you Ben. I'm Sarah.

BEN

Sarah. That, you know, definitely has a ring to it.

They stare at one another.

BEN

So crazy to be standing there, you know, two sets of police, and neither one of us could do anything.

SARAH

Because of *Oliphant*.

BEN

An elephant?

MITCH AND SARAH

*Oliphant*.

MITCH

Supreme Court case.

WATIE

Oh no. Two attorneys in the same room.

SARAH

In 1978 the Supreme Court said Tribes can no longer exercise criminal jurisdiction over non-Indians who come onto tribal lands and commit a crime.

BEN

That's just, wrong.

SARAH

Tell that to your United States Supreme Court.

BEN

You don't like the Court?

SARAH

I respect it.

BEN

So you're like a Catholic that hates the Vatican.

SARAH

It's hard to worship an institution that always decides against you.

BEN

You've never won a case?

SARAH

*Worcester v. Georgia.*

WATIE

We won a case in 1822.

SARAH

32.

WATIE

32, excuse me.

BEN

Rooster v. Georgia?

SARAH

Yes, but pronounced wooster.

BEN

Indians have weird names.

WATIE

Worcester was white.

SARAH

We won that case. And we've lost ever since.

BEN

So you're telling me that because of this Elephant case, I could steal your car, I could steal your yoga mat-

SARAH

I don't do yoga.

BEN

But if you did-

SARAH

You could set my house on fire, graffiti our Courthouse, kill someone, basically do whatever you want and Cherokee Nation could never prosecute you.

But, if Cherokee Nation were to actually get off its butt and implement VAWA, we could prosecute domestic violence crimes perpetrated by non-Indians.

WATIE

Va what?

SARAH

Violence Against Women Act. You don't know about the Violence Against Women Act?

WATIE

I'm a man.

SARAH

Just six years ago, Congress re-authorized the Violence Against Women Act *with* a tribal jurisdiction provision in it.

WATIE

You lost me at authorized. Can I make a suggestion? Skip anything above two syllables.

BEN

VA-WA, that works.

SARAH

In *VAWA*, Congress restored a piece of our criminal jurisdiction. The criminal jurisdiction that *Oliphant* took away.

WATIE

Jur-is-dic-shun. You lost me at dick.

SARAH

You know jurisdiction.

WATIE

I know we don't have it. Over white guys.

SARAH

And I'm telling you that VAWA restored it. A piece of it.

WATIE

Oh. Wow.

SARAH

Yeah.

WATIE

Why didn't you tell me that in the first place?

SARAH

I swear. Sometimes I want to hit you.

MITCH

You're not the only one.

BEN

(to SARAH) Are you this passionate about everything in life?

WATIE

Alright, I'm back on.

MITCH

Already?

WATIE

My ten minutes are up. Gentlemen, I'd say it's been a pleasure, but-

SARAH

Do you need to see a doctor? You know, get checked out?

WATIE

Why?

SARAH

You were hit in the face.

WATIE

I'll be fine.

SARAH

Watie!

WATIE goes to exit.

SARAH

The key. To your apartment.

WATIE

Look in the mailbox. Mitch, good to see you-

MITCH

See you around, man.

BEN

Nice to meet you.

WATIE

Thanks for saving my ass.

BEN

I didn't do anything.

WATIE

You did more than I could.

WATIE exits.

MITCH

OK, well, it's late and-

SARAH

It's a drive. You know, back to Jay.

MITCH

It sure is. Good to see you Sarah.

SARAH

Don't be a stranger. I live here now.

MITCH starts to exit.

MITCH

Ben.

BEN

Huh?

MITCH

I'm your ride.

BEN

Oh, yeah. Right. (*to SARAH*) Hey, I gotta go.

SARAH

OK. Yeah . . . See you around.

BEN

Hey uh, you wanna get dinner?

SARAH

Oh, I'm good. Just ate.

MITCH

He's asking you on a date.

SARAH

Oh.

BEN

It's cool, you're a busy woman-

MITCH

He knows you're a big deal.

BEN

You've got cases to win and-

SARAH

Yes.

BEN

Yes?

MITCH

Yes, she'll go to dinner with you.

SARAH

I'd love to.

MITCH

OK bye.

MITCH exits. BEN looks at SARAH. He exits.

**TWO.** Shift to the past. 1820s. JOHN RIDGE enters, a pencil tucked tightly between his lips, his legs immobile. He pulls himself across the floor using his arms only, in his small room in the Northrups' home in Cornwall, Connecticut. He is ill and has lost the ability to walk.

His crutches lean against the bed. He arrives at the bed and attempts to pull himself up. He fails.

ELIAS BOUDINOT enters, carrying several books for JOHN. He stops when he sees JOHN RIDGE.

JOHN RIDGE

(*takes pencil out of his mouth*) I'm fine.

ELIAS

(*puts the books down on the bedside table*) Let me help you-

JOHN RIDGE

I can do this.

JOHN RIDGE puts the pencil back between his lips and struggles again to pull himself into bed. He fails.

Beat.

He looks to ELIAS. Without saying a word, ELIAS picks him up and places him in his bed.

JOHN RIDGE

I dropped my pencil. And it rolled. Across the room.

ELIAS nods.

ELIAS

We moved on to Cicero (*places books on bedside table*).

JOHN RIDGE

Already?

ELIAS

Teacher skipped ahead. Said Cicero's the most important of all the Roman philosophers, so we should study him first. You do your lessons for Latin?

JOHN RIDGE nods.

ELIAS

Let me know if you have any questions.

ELIAS turns to exit.

JOHN RIDGE

Buck. Before you leave, could you-

ELIAS

Elias. I changed my name.

JOHN RIDGE

Sure, but-

ELIAS

I want you to call me by my name.

JOHN RIDGE

A name that truly isn't your name.

ELIAS

Gallegina Uwatie. That is what my parents named me. But Elias Boudinot was a delegate to the Continental Congress-

JOHN RIDGE

You admire him.

ELIAS

He sponsored me. If not for him, I couldn't have come here. He got me into this school.

JOHN RIDGE

I had a sponsor to come here, I had to, but I never took his name.

ELIAS brandishes the Bible in his hands.

ELIAS

Psalm 147:3 "He heals the brokenhearted-

JOHN RIDGE

Not now.

ELIAS

Professing your faith in the Christian Church could make your love for the schoolmaster's daughter a bit more palatable (*places Bible on bedside table*).

JOHN RIDGE

You will never hear me profess a faith I do not possess.

ELIAS

Everyone keeps asking me, Elias, when will your cousin John accept the Lord our Christ into his heart?

JOHN RIDGE

When they accept the Indian into theirs.

Beat.

ELIAS

What did the doctor say?

JOHN RIDGE

He doesn't know.

ELIAS

But you will walk again.

JOHN RIDGE

He said I might never.

ELIAS

You can't think like that. You have to focus on what we're here to study. We have to learn, master their ways so we can go home and use them, fight for our Nation-

JOHN RIDGE

You think a crippled is going to save our Nation?

SARAH (Sarah Bird Northrup) enters, carrying a bowl of soup.

SARAH

Cook burnt a whole batch and I had to wait for her to make the next. I hate to make you wait.

JOHN RIDGE

When you're gone, I have nothing to look forward to.

ELIAS

I'll be leaving now.

SARAH

My apologies-

JOHN RIDGE

Don't apologize. Elias was on his way out.

ELIAS exits. She places the soup on the table next to JOHN's bed.

JOHN RIDGE

My day consists of three parts: before you bring me soup, when you bring me soup, after you've brought me soup.

SARAH

Call me when you finish. Mother hates to find you with dirty dishes.

JOHN RIDGE

Wait for me to finish and you can take them with you.

SARAH

I have to sweep the kitchen.

JOHN RIDGE

Arise, fair sun, and kill the envious moon-

SARAH

John-

JOHN RIDGE

Who is already sick and pale with grief-

SARAH

I have chores-

JOHN RIDGE

It is my lady; O, it is my love!

SARAH

We never finished Macbeth.

JOHN RIDGE

Look at me, rushing on to Romeo and Juliet. . . . Let's finish Macbeth.

SARAH

Not now.

JOHN RIDGE

Twenty pages.

SARAH

Mother would notice.

JOHN RIDGE

So what if she did?

SARAH

I've been instructed *not* to read Shakespeare with you.

JOHN RIDGE

What's wrong with Shakespeare?

SARAH

It's not Shakespeare that concerns her.

Beat.

SARAH

I almost forgot. You have a letter.

She hands it to him. He continues to look at her.

SARAH

Are you going to open it?

JOHN RIDGE

Oh. Yes. (*opens the letter*) It's from my father.

SARAH

What does he say? (*realizes what she has requested*) I'm sorry, how rude of me-

JOHN RIDGE

(*reading from letter*) He leaves this month for Washington, for meetings at the White House.

SARAH

With the President?

JOHN RIDGE

Our leaders routinely meet with the President of the United States, the King of England-  
(*continues to read*) He has a position for me! He's Speaker of our Tribal Council, and he wants me to assist him!

SARAH

You're going home.

JOHN RIDGE

You thought I would stay.

SARAH

How foolish of me-

JOHN RIDGE

We have three months. Three months together, from now until I graduate.

SARAH

Mother asked me if I loved you.

JOHN RIDGE

What did you say?

SARAH

I love the way you take your napkin and wipe the soup bowl dry, I think because you don't want me to spill soup on myself when I climb back down the stairs with your dishes. I love the little poems you write and drop on the floor, you miss the trashcan from your bed, but when you're asleep I pick them up and read them. I've read all of them. I love your words, your tenacity, your devotion-

JOHN RIDGE

Marry me.

Beat.

SARAH

I would if I could.

JOHN RIDGE

I'll talk to your father.

SARAH

I already have.

JOHN RIDGE

What did he say?

WOMAN'S VOICE FROM  
OFFSTAGE

(calling) SARAH!

SARAH

The schoolmaster's daughter is not permitted to marry a savage.

WOMAN'S VOICE FROM  
OFFSTAGE

(calling) SARAH!

She separates herself from him and walks to the door.

SARAH

I have to go.

WOMAN'S VOICE FROM  
OFFSTAGE

SARAH!

SARAH

I love you John Ridge.

She exits.

**THREE** Back to 2019. Cherokee Nation Attorney General's Office. JIM ROSS sits at his desk. SARAH (RIDGE POLSON) enters, dressed very formally.

JIM ROSS

Sarah Polson.

SARAH

That's me.

JIM ROSS

Very impressive resume.

SARAH

Thank you.

JIM ROSS

And you think you want to work in the Attorney General's office?

SARAH

I know I do.

JIM ROSS

This isn't Yale, you know.

SARAH

Sure-

JIM ROSS

We don't sit around drinking lattes and debating what Thomas Jefferson meant when he said some shit back in 1804.

SARAH

He called us "merciless savages" in the Declaration of Independence. I think we all know what that means. We don't need to debate it.

JIM ROSS

What'd you study? In Law school.

SARAH

The law.

JIM ROSS

Right. What classes did you take?

SARAH

Just you know, the regular classes-

JIM ROSS

Did you take Indian law?

SARAH

I did not.

JIM ROSS

You want to practice Indian law but you never studied it.

SARAH

Yale didn't offer it.

JIM ROSS

So you studied their Constitution but didn't study ours.

SARAH

I don't need to study our Constitution. I know it.

JIM ROSS

Which one.

SARAH

All of them-

JIM ROSS

All of them.

SARAH

1999, September 6 1839, 1827-

JIM ROSS

You're a citizen?

SARAH

I'm enrolled.

JIM ROSS

But you've never lived in Tahlequah.

SARAH

I was born in Jay.

JIM ROSS

But you've never lived there-

SARAH

I grew up there.

JIM ROSS

But as an adult. You've never lived there.

SARAH

You're right. I've never lived there as an adult.

JIM ROSS

And you're sure now, after living in (*reads from resume*) New Haven, New York, Chicago, after living in all those places, you're ready to drive ten miles to Wal Mart just to buy shampoo, eat tater tots at Sonic, and connect to wifi periodically. If you're lucky. This is Tahlequah. We don't have Starbucks.

SARAH

I want to come home.

Beat.

JIM ROSS

Forgive me, it's just, I can't afford to hire someone that's gonna quit after two weeks-

SARAH

You think I would quit?

JIM ROSS

You might, after you've been here-

SARAH

I've never quit anything in my life.

JIM ROSS

(reading from her resume) Southern District of New York, clerkship. Judge Posner, Seventh Circuit, clerkship, with a resume like this, you should be clerking on the Supreme Court. Not working in Tahlequah.

SARAH

I applied to clerk on the Supreme Court. Three years in a row. Didn't even get an interview.

JIM ROSS

Oh. Yale Law School, it just seems-

SARAH

No Justice has ever hired a citizen of a Tribal Nation to clerk for them. In the history of the United States Supreme Court, there's no record of a Native law clerk.

Beat.

SARAH

I want to serve my Nation.

JIM ROSS

If you could accomplish one thing while you work in this office, what would it be?

SARAH

One of the perks of being a student at Yale, besides the lattes and enlightened discussions of what our "founding fathers" meant, is that your professors are connected. You know, to high-ups, in the government. One of my professors had come from the DOJ. And she came to me one day and said, hey do you want a ticket to the VAWA Signing Ceremony-

JIM ROSS

VAWA?

SARAH

Violence Against Women Act-

JIM ROSS

I know what VAWA is.

SARAH

I was there. On March 7, 2013 when the President signed VAWA into law. I watched Diane Millich share her story-

JIM ROSS

I've read her story, in the New York Times.

SARAH

I watched her introduce the President.

JIM ROSS

You want to work on VAWA.

SARAH

I want Cherokee Nation to implement it.

JIM ROSS

We just did. Council voted 16-0 to implement VAWA 904-

SARAH

They agreed to implement VAWA?

JIM ROSS

Based on a resolution I drafted and presented.

SARAH

To me, VAWA is no different than treaty signing.

JIM ROSS

Yes!

SARAH

It's a modern day treaty from one sovereign to another.

JIM ROSS

Exactly!

SARAH

Like the Treaty of New Echota-

JIM ROSS

What?

SARAH

I'm just making a comparison-

JIM ROSS

We don't talk about that treaty.

SARAH

Who's "we"?

JIM ROSS

Me, everyone, the entire Cherokee Nation. Traitors signed that treaty-

SARAH

The Ridges signed that treaty-

JIM ROSS

Like I said, traitors signed that treaty. They caused the Trail of Tears.

SARAH

Do you know any Ridges?

JIM ROSS

Never met one. They don't exist. I mean, they might exist elsewhere. But they aren't here, in Cherokee Nation. They signed the treaty, and then they left. Never came back. I heard one lived in California. Maybe Seattle. I don't know, and I don't care.

Look, sorry. I'm a Ross. You know, Jim Ross. John Ross was my grandfather's great-grandfather. I'm a direct descendant. So please, never, ever, talk to me about that Treaty.

SARAH

Understood.

JIM ROSS

But what you're saying about treaties is right-

SARAH

After they've been ratified by the Senate, they're the "Supreme law of the land"-

JIM ROSS

I want you to come with me.

SARAH

Where?

JIM ROSS

DC. The Department of Justice meets with every Tribe that implements VAWA 904. So now they want to meet with us. And I want you to prepare my talking points-

SARAH

For the DOJ?

JIM ROSS

We leave on Monday.

SARAH

Does this mean?

JIM ROSS

You're hired.

**FOUR** - White House. 1828. The ANDREW JACKSON greets MAJOR RIDGE and JOHN ROSS in the foyer of the Oval Office.

ANDREW JACKSON

Well look at this, the Major. Here, in Washington. Have you come to see me?

MAJOR RIDGE shakes ANDREW JACKSON's hand.

MAJOR RIDGE

(in Cherokee) Hello General.

ANDREW JACKSON

I love this man. (to JOHN ROSS) I really, truly love this man.

JOHN ROSS

(nods) President Jackson.

ANDREW JACKSON

Sounds good, doesn't it? And, don't tell me, this must be . . .

JOHN ROSS

John Ross. I serve on the Cherokee Nation Tribal Council.

ANDREW JACKSON

Nothing but the official delegation for me, eh?

MAJOR RIDGE

We are so pleased to hear you won the election.

ANDREW JACKSON

I can't think you enough for your support.

JOHN ROSS

We were happy to give it.

ANDREW JACKSON

You're well-spoken, my boy. A real charm. Just like your father here-

JOHN ROSS

He's not my father-

ANDREW JACKSON

Your leader, your Chief, Major Ridge. Woulda lost at Horseshoe Bend if it weren't for this man and all the Cherokee who followed him into battle. He crossed the Tallapoosa and led the attack from the rear.

MAJOR RIDGE

They left an opening, and we took it-

ANDREW JACKSON

He has a way with words. Poetic, really. A real orator, that's for sure. I used to watch him at night, after supper. Men would gather around at all hours of night, until the early morning, just to hear him speak. Couldn't understand a damn word he said, but they listened just the same.

He won that battle for us, our Nation, the entire United States. That's why I named him Major. You know I gave him his name?

MAJOR RIDGE

The State of Georgia lays claim to our lands, and the federal agents in our midst have begun to play foul.

ANDREW JACKSON

You fear you will lose your land?

JOHN ROSS

The State of Georgia is attempting to take it from us.

MAJOR RIDGE

Unlawfully. With violence and fraud.

ANDREW JACKSON

I understand several Tribes are negotiating treaties to sell their lands and move west.

MAJOR RIDGE

We will never leave our lands.

ANDREW JACKSON

The Choctaw just signed a treaty. They're moving west.

JOHN ROSS

We're not the Choctaw.

ANDREW JACKSON

And the Chickasaw.

MAJOR RIDGE

We're Cherokee Nation. And we're not moving.

GOVERNOR FORSYTH enters the foyer. ANDREW JACKSON also enters the foyer.

JOHN ROSS

Governor Forsyth.

GOVERNOR FORSYTH waives his copy of the Cherokee Phoenix at the Cherokee men.

GOVERNOR FORSYTH

There's no "e" in Forsyth. F-o-r-s-y-t-h. No "e." Now you got the "e" in Governor. It is true there is an "e" there. And there is also an "e" in Georgia. But there's no "e" in Forsyth. I'm sure this is all very confusing for you.

ANDREW JACKSON

If you'll excuse me gentleman, I'm scheduled to meet with the Governor.

MAJOR RIDGE

(in Cherokee) *Friendship formed in danger should not be forgotten.*

ANDREW JACKSON looks to JOHN RIDGE.

ANDREW JACKSON

What did he say?

JOHN RIDGE

Friendship formed in danger should not be forgotten.

Beat.

ANDREW JACKSON

I say this as your friend. You find yourselves established in the midst of a superior race, and although you do not appreciate the cause of your inferiority, if you do not yield to the force and progress of civilization and move West, you will disappear.

ANDREW JACKSON escorts GOVERNOR FORSYTH into the Oval Office. MAJOR RIDGE and JOHN ROSS exit.

GOVERNOR FORSYTH hands ANDREW JACKSON the paper.

GOVERNOR FORSYTH

Thought you might want to see this.

ANDREW JACKSON reads the paper and realizes what it is.

**ANDREW JACKSON**

The Cherokee have a paper?

**GOVERNOR FORSYTH**

That they circulate from Atlanta to Boston.

**GOVERNOR FORSYTH**

They wrote a Constitution. They established a Court. They think their jurisdiction extends to *United States* citizens living on Cherokee lands.

**ANDREW JACKSON**

I've always said, take their lands and you'll take their jurisdiction.

**GOVERNOR FORSYTH**

About that. With all due respect Mr. President, we have an Indian problem.

**ANDREW JACKSON**

You and every other Governor east of the Mississippi.

**GOVERNOR FORSYTH**

The Cherokee are an impediment to the expansion of slavery, and cotton, and-

**ANDREW JACKSON**

The Cherokee have slavery. They own slaves.

**GOVERNOR FORSYTH**

Their idea of slavery is a farce.

**ANDREW JACKSON**

They are good people. I assure you, they're not to be blamed for their inferiority.

**GOVERNOR FORSYTH**

We discovered gold. On Cherokee lands, and the only way we can-

**ANDREW JACKSON**

Copper, gold, silver, furs, salt, tobacco, sugarcane-- all of our industries want to expand but can't because of the Indians. This isn't about Georgia and the Cherokee, or Mississippi and the Choctaw, or Florida and the Seminole. This is about the economy of the entire United States. From the Potawatomi to the Cherokee, until we've moved them all, the progress of the entire Nation will be blocked. So be patient. You're not alone. (*looking at the paper*) Who's this Samuel Worcester?

**GOVERNOR FORSYTH**

The reverend. He's a missionary, from Vermont.

ANDREW JACKSON

What's he doing in Cherokee Nation?

GOVERNOR FORSYTH

He brought them the printing press, and he's working with a young Cherokee man by the name of Elias Boudinot to print this paper weekly. In Cherokee and English. And, might I add, the Federal Government pays his salary.

ANDREW JACKSON

To work on a Cherokee paper?

GOVERNOR FORSYTH

To run the Postal Office. But he spends most of his time working on the paper. Apparently, he's learned to speak Cherokee.

ANDREW JACKSON

I will see to it that he's removed from his position. But you have got to remove him from Cherokee Nation.

GOVERNOR FORSYTH

We have no authority to enter Cherokee lands-

ANDREW JACKSON

Then make some. Pass a law. Forbid him to be there.

GOVERNOR FORSYTH

With all due respect, Mr. President: Cherokee removal was a campaign promise.

ANDREW JACKSON

Build a fire under them. When it gets hot enough, they'll move.

ANDREW JACKSON and GOVERNOR FORSYTH  
exit.

FIVE. Later in 2019, SARAH stands in the Polson/Ridge/Watie cemetery, in front of John Ridge's grave.

SARAH

This is my great-great-great grandfather, John Ridge. His dad, Major Ridge, is right next to him. My grandmother, she's just three rows down. Aunt Mo, Uncle Buck, my whole family's buried here.

BEN

(from offstage) There is just nowhere to pee.

SARAH

Someday, I will be buried here.

BEN

(enters) How far back is that gas station?

SARAH

Major Ridge, John Ridge signed the Treaty,

BEN

Ten minutes?

SARAH

Are you listening to me?

BEN

We were in the car for an hour and a half. I have to pee.

SARAH

John's cousin, Stand Watie, over here, John's other cousin, Elias's brother, he signed the Treaty too.

BEN

The treaty, the treaty, the treaty, yes I know, all you talk about is the treaty.

SARAH

We don't have to do this.

BEN

Oh, no. I'm happy to be here, I want to be here.

SARAH

I'm not having kids with you unless they understand where they come from.

FLORA enters.

FLORA

Did someone die?

SARAH

Oh, hi Flora.

FLORA

Haven't seen you here since we buried your mom.

SARAH

I moved back. And I got a job. I'm working for the Nation. In the Attorney General's Office.

FLORA

Rosses control that office.

SARAH

I work for one.

FLORA

How the hell did you convince him to hire a Ridge?

SARAH

He doesn't know I'm a Ridge.

FLORA

You gonna tell him?

SARAH

Yeah. Yeah, I am. I'm just, you know, waiting for the right time.

FLORA

The moment he finds out you're a Ridge, he'll do whatever he can to undermine you, your work, and your reputation. The day you trust a Ross is the day they kill you.

BEN

(introduces himself to FLORA) Hi, I'm Ben.

SARAH

Oh my gosh, I'm so sorry, Flora, this is my fiance, Ben.

BEN

Nice to meet you.

FLORA

You're not dead.

BEN

I hope not.

FLORA

I usually only meet my cousins' significant others when they come here to bury them. Will you be buried here?

SARAH

We haven't gotten that far yet.

BEN

Do you have a bathroom?

FLORA

Why?

BEN

I need to pee.

FLORA

That's what trees are for.

BEN

I didn't want to be rude-

FLORA

It's not rude. The cows do it all the time.

BEN

I'll be right back.

BEN trots off.

FLORA

Sure is nice to see you. I don't hardly see anyone anymore. Unless someone dies. I see lots of folks when someone dies. But then once the funeral's over, everyone goes home. And they don't come back. And then it's just me. And the cows. Who ran over the fence. Had to fix the damn thing myself last year. Replaced it with an electric. It's expensive to keep a cemetery up.

SARAH

I'll make a donation.

FLORA

That'd be nice. I'll put some flowers by your mom.

SARAH

Thanks. I can't find Sarah. I thought she must be next to John Ridge. But she's not. I've checked each row like ten times. Up and down and back again. And I can't find her.

FLORA

She's in Arkansas.

SARAH

She's buried in Arkansas?

FLORA

You didn't know.

SARAH

I never looked for her-

FLORA

You're named after her. She's your namesake. *Sarah* Bird Northrup.

SARAH

I know her name.

FLORA

You just don't know where she's buried.

SARAH

No one talks in this family-

FLORA

You know where John is. You visit him.

SARAH

My mom, grandma, Uncle Buck, my whole family's buried ten feet away from him.

FLORA

After they killed John, she took the kids and left. She never came back.

SARAH

Grandma never spoke of Sarah.

FLORA

Her story is the saddest.

Beat.

SARAH

Are you busy next week? Friday night?

FLORA

Uh let me think. No. I have no plans. Why?

SARAH

We're having a dinner. At our house-

FLORA

Oh, I don't want to impose-

SARAH

I would love for you to be there. Dad's coming.

FLORA

You're talking to him again.

SARAH

I always talk to him. When he returns my calls.

FLORA

How'd you convince him to come back to Tahlequah?

SARAH

I told him I wanted him to come and meet my fiance.

BEN

(from offstage) AHHHHHHHH!!!! YOUR FENCE IS ELECTRIC.

FLORA

I told him to pee on a tree.

**SIX.** Back at Cherokee Nation (1820s), JOHN ROSS sits at the table with MAJOR RIDGE at MAJOR RIDGE's home in Rome Georgia.

MAJOR RIDGE

(regards a piece of paper before him) You drafted this?

JOHN ROSS

It's a rough sketch.

MAJOR RIDGE

(reads) "That any *person* or *persons* . . ."

JOHN ROSS

I thought about adding "or any citizen of Georgia."

MAJOR RIDGE

You think they're excluded from "persons"?

JOHN ROSS

We need to make clear the law applies to non-Cherokees, citizens of Georgia, including the Guard who-

MAJOR RIDGE

The Georgia Guard may act like animals, but that doesn't mean they aren't persons. This law, once passed, will apply to any *person* who sets foot on Cherokee soil. (*returns to reading*) "That any person or persons"-

JOHN ROSS

(*writes in*) "whatssoever"-

MAJOR RIDGE nods in agreement and takes the paper back. He keeps reading.

MAJOR RIDGE

"Whatssoever, who shall lay violent hands upon any female, by . . . abusing her person and committing a rape upon such female, he or they, so offending, upon conviction before any of the district or circuit Judges, for the first offence, shall be punished."

JOHN ROSS

We will prosecute anyone who rapes a woman on Cherokee lands.

MAJOR RIDGE nods.

MAJOR RIDGE

I told Chief Hicks we'd have a draft for his review first thing in the morning. Council's set to vote tomorrow.

JOHN ROSS

Two Councilmen have said they'll vote against it.

MAJOR RIDGE

They're opposed?

JOHN ROSS

They're still simmering over the blood law vote, they disagreed with our decision to codify-

MAJOR RIDGE

Let me talk to them.

JOHN ROSS

We don't need their votes. This will easily pass-

MAJOR RIDGE

Unanimously. I'll speak to them.

JOHN ROSS nods.

MAJOR RIDGE

On this, we can't be divided. We can't appear to be divided. This is an attack on our women, in an attempt to attack our Nation.

JOHN ROSS

Let me manage your campaign. For Chief.

MAJOR RIDGE

My campaign?

JOHN ROSS

Hicks announced he won't run again, everyone's talking about you. I apologize for being so forward, but I've thought a lot about this. I know I'm inexperienced. I'm young. But I can write your speeches. Draft your platform. You've seen my writing-

MAJOR RIDGE

I think *you* should run.

JOHN ROSS

Me?

MAJOR RIDGE

I'll help you write *your* speeches.

JOHN ROSS

You aren't going to run?

MAJOR RIDGE

I'm too old.

JOHN ROSS

What about your son John?

MAJOR RIDGE

He's too young.

JOHN ROSS

No one's done more for Cherokee Nation than you.

MAJOR RIDGE

Everything I've done, we've done together.

**SEVEN** - Not too long after. SARAH BIRD NORTHRUP places food on the table where JOHN RIDGE, ELIAS BOUDINOT, and SAMUEL WORCESTER sit.

**SAMUEL WORCESTER**

You think we should pull Recipes for Insuring Health.

**ELIAS**

No. Sunset in the Alps.

**SAMUEL WORCESTER**

Sunset in the Alps stays. Recipes can go.

**ELIAS**

Have you ever seen a sunset in the Alps?

**SAMUEL WORCESTER**

I've never left the United States.

**ELIAS**

So why are we covering something none of us have seen?

**SAMUEL WORCESTER**

We need to seem worldly. Folks in the northeast will know the Phoenix is a world class paper if we discuss the fantastic sunsets in the Alps.

**JOHN RIDGE**

How about an article on stickball?

**SAMUEL WORCESTER**

I advise against that.

**JOHN RIDGE**

Because you think stickball is a sin?

**SAMUEL WORCESTER**

Those were the words I used in my sermon, yes.

**JOHN RIDGE**

We've played stickball for thousands of years. When we come together to play, it isn't a game. It's spiritual.

**SAMUEL WORCESTER**

It's heathen. And no good Christian man should have anything to do with it.

SARAH BIRD NORTHRUP

Potatoes anyone?

MAJOR RIDGE and JOHN ROSS enter.

MAJOR RIDGE

My apologies for being late.

SARAH BIRD NORTHRUP

Think nothing of it.

JOHN ROSS

I hope we didn't keep you waiting.

JOHN RIDGE

Have a seat.

SARAH BIRD NORTHRUP jumps up to dish out food.

SARAH BIRD NORTHRUP

I'll fix you both a plate.

ELIAS

Uncle, let me introduce you to the Reverend, Samuel Worcester.

SAMUEL WORCESTER stands to shake MAJOR RIDGE's hand.

SAMUEL WORCESTER

So pleased to make your acquaintance.

JOHN ROSS

(extends his hand to SAMUEL WORCESTER) John Ross. I serve on the Cherokee Nation Tribal Council, along with our Speaker, Major Ridge.

MAJOR RIDGE

Sarah, pull out our finest silver.

SARAH BIRD NORTHRUP

Yes.

SARAH BIRD NORTHRUP retrieves the finest silver for the Reverend.

MAJOR RIDGE

Nothing but the best for the man who brought us the printing press.

SAMUEL WORCESTER

It is nothing less than an honor to work on behalf of your Nation-

MAJOR RIDGE

You've caused quite the upset. The President, Governor Forsyth, they're not happy.

JOHN RIDGE

How was the trip to Washington?

The men settle in, as SARAH BIRD NORTHRUP serves the men their plates and then returns to her seat.

JOHN ROSS

Long.

MAJOR RIDGE

But quite productive.

JOHN ROSS

We managed to collide with Governor Forsyth.

ELIAS

He's seen the paper?

JOHN ROSS

(nods) He's quite upset about it.

JOHN RIDGE

You heard about the law Georgia just passed.

SAMUEL WORCESTER

We're printing an article on it right now.

SARAH

The soldiers are here.

JOHN RIDGE

The Georgia Guard-

SARAH

I've seen them. Arrest people. In the streets-

JOHN RIDGE

I promise you, in our home, you're safe.

MAJOR RIDGE

Well, Reverend.

ELIAS

He refused.

JOHN ROSS

You refused to sign?

SAMUEL WORCESTER

I sit before you on Cherokee lands in defiance of Georgia law.

JOHN RIDGE

It really *isn't* in defiance of Georgia law because Georgia's laws have no application here, they have no jurisdiction-

ELIAS

Always the attorney. We'll be sure to state that in our article.

MAJOR RIDGE

We're so thankful that you didn't sign your allegiance. To the Governor.

SAMUEL WORCESTER

My allegiance is to the Lord above, and the Lord alone.

Beat.

SAMUEL WORCESTER

I must say, it's wondrous to arrive in Cherokee Nation and see a friendly face from up in north. Sarah, I knew your father.

SARAH BIRD NORTHRUP

Through the church?

SAMUEL WORCESTER

The Board of Missionaries. I helped start the school, in Cornwall, before I moved south, to preach the Gospel. Your father is a true, and I mean one of the few remaining, true Christian men.

SARAH BIRD NORTHRUP

For the most part.

SAMUEL WORCESTER

He is consumed with Christ-

SARAH BIRD NORTHRUP

He wasn't going to let me marry John. He told me the only way he'd permit me to marry John would be if John regained the ability to walk without a crutch-

JOHN RIDGE

Which I did.

SARAH BIRD NORTHRUP

But the doctor said he couldn't. That he wouldn't, ever-

SAMUEL WORCESTER

All the same, he permitted the marriage. In his own home.

SARAH

We were attacked. By a mob. Men and women. Dozens of them. As soon as John arrived. The men threw rocks. The women screamed. Savage. Heathen. "You will rot in hell." Those are the words I remember most. My father tried to sneak us out back, but they caught wind of our escape and almost toppled the carriage.

JOHN RIDGE

Any Indian marrying a white girl from Connecticut had better carry a knife.

**GEORGIA GUARD** enters, armed with a gun.

**GEORGIA GUARD**

Reverend Worcester?

SAMUEL WORCESTER

That's me.

**GEORGIA GUARD**

You're under arrest.

ELIAS

For what?

**GEORGIA GUARD**

Violating Georgia law.

JOHN RIDGE

Georgia's laws have no application here. This is Cherokee Nation.

**GEORGIA GUARD**

This man entered Cherokee lands without the permission of the Governor-

SARAH

He's here to preach the Gospel.

GEORGIA GUARD

(turns to SARAH) Do you live here?

SARAH

I do.

GEORGIA GUARD

With the permission of the Governor?

JOHN RIDGE

With the permission of Cherokee Nation.

GEORGIA GUARD

It is illegal for any white man, or woman, to set foot on Cherokee soil without the permission of the Governor of Georgia.

SARAH

I'm married to a Cherokee.

He leans in.

GEORGIA GUARD

Does that make you *Cherokee*?

JOHN RIDGE

She's my wife.

GEORGIA GUARD

Your wife? (to SARAH) You know, we've been instructed to violate Cherokee women who do not obey our commands.

MAJOR RIDGE

Leave her alone.

SAMUEL WORCESTER

(steps forward) You came to arrest me. Please.

GEORGIA GUARD escorts SAMUEL WORCESTER off.

**EIGHT. GEORGIA GUARD** marches SAMUEL WORCESTER into a jail cell. JOHN RIDGE enters SAMUEL WORCESTER in jail. One week has passed since his arrest. Georgia, 1832.

SAMUEL WORCESTER

How's my wife?

JOHN RIDGE

Good.

SAMUEL WORCESTER

My children?

JOHN RIDGE

They're great. Really great.

SAMUEL WORCESTER

Are they scared?

JOHN RIDGE

Elias is taking good care of them.

SAMUEL WORCESTER

Tell them I will see them on Monday.

JOHN RIDGE

Monday?

SAMUEL WORCESTER

I told the Governor. I'm going to sign his paper.

JOHN RIDGE

You can't do that-

SAMUEL WORCESTER

I let them arrest me, I made my statement, and now I've spent five days in jail-

JOHN RIDGE

I'm only asking for a few more.

SAMUEL WORCESTER

To do what?

JOHN RIDGE

Challenge your conviction. In the Supreme Court-

SAMUEL WORCESTER

That could take years.

JOHN RIDGE

Or maybe months. Depending on how fast-

SAMUEL WORCESTER

I want to go home. I miss my family. I can't stay here-

JOHN RIDGE

This isn't about you-

SAMUEL WORCESTER

I seem to be the one sitting here.

Beat.

SAMUEL WORCESTER

It's nothing more than a piece of paper. And when I sign it, I get to go home.

JOHN RIDGE

What does it say?

SAMUEL WORCESTER

That I entered Cherokee lands without Georgia's permission.

JOHN RIDGE

Georgia has no jurisdiction on our lands.

SAMUEL WORCESTER

They have soldiers. And they're arresting people like me, anyone who does not obey their command-

JOHN RIDGE

They arrested you to make a statement. If they can enter our lands and remove you, they can remove me. And every other citizen of Cherokee Nation.

SAMUEL WORCESTER

I think it's inevitable-

JOHN RIDGE

They want to establish a precedent. And you're willing to give it to them.

SAMUEL WORCESTER

I want to go home.

JOHN RIDGE

So you'll let them take mine.

Beat.

SAMUEL WORCESTER

Perhaps we should pray. Or I could read to you. From the Bible. In Cherokee. That's all I have done since I've been here. My translations. (*picks up some pages and hands them to JOHN*) Tell Elias I stopped at John chapter 7, verse 24. "Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment." Now "judgement" in Cherokee, that's hard to translate.

Beat.

SAMUEL WORCESTER

You do not read the Bible.

JOHN RIDGE

My faith is in the Cherokee Constitution. Not the Bible.

SAMUEL WORCESTER

The two aren't mutually exclusive.

JOHN RIDGE

Then why is one being used as a reason to extinguish the other?

**GEORGIA GUARD** enters.

**GEORGIA GUARD**

Five minutes. (*to JOHN RIDGE very slowly, over-enunciating*) Fiiiiivvveee minnnnnutttessssss.

**GEORGIA GUARD** points to the ornate watch on JOHN RIDGE's wrist and flashes all five fingers.

**GEORGIA GUARD**

(*to SAMUEL WORCESTER*) Tell your friend here he's got five minutes, then he's gotta go.

JOHN RIDGE

I can tell time. I can also speak English.

GEORGIA GUARD

Well now that is a first.

JOHN RIDGE

Did you know that, at this very moment, Cherokee Nation citizens can read and write at rates higher than the citizens of Georgia?

GEORGIA GUARD

Do you defy me? (*to SAMUEL WORCESTER*) I think he defies me.

JOHN RIDGE

Defy an officer of the State of Georgia? Who's ever heard of such a thing.

GEORGIA GUARD

I oughta arrest you right now.

SAMUEL WORCESTER

Please, Officer, we were about to pray.

GEORGIA GUARD

Oh. Well now. I gotta hear that. Never heard an Indian pray before. Let me hear you pray, boy. Let me hear you pray for that heathen soul. I SAID, LET ME HEAR YOU PRAY.

SAMUEL WORCESTER

He believes in Christ, Officer. I've heard him profess his faith numerous times.

GEORGIA GUARD

There's a special place in hell for savages like you.

GEORGIA GUARD exits.

SAMUEL WORCESTER

I've heard some appeals to the Supreme Court don't take as long as one might think. What would you, if you were to appeal my conviction, what would you argue?

JOHN RIDGE

Georgia had no authority to arrest you because Cherokee Nation is the *only* sovereign with jurisdiction over Cherokee lands.

John Ross and I prepared the papers, and we've secured the assistance of William Wirt, former Attorney General under Adams.

SAMUEL WORCESTER

What do you need from me?

JOHN RIDGE

Your signature.

SAMUEL WORCESTER

Just tell me where to sign.

**NINE.** Late 2019. Friday night. Sarah's house.  
ROGER, SARAH, BEN, FLORA, and WATIE sit around  
the kitchen table. The table is full of food.

BEN

So would you say that Indians, I mean Native Americans-

FLORA

You can call us Indians.

ROGER

But we prefer Injun.

BEN

Sure.

SARAH

Dad.

BEN

I didn't know, you know, until I met Sarah, that Injuns believe in-

SARAH

*Indians.* Don't listen to him.

BEN

(nods) I didn't know y'all were Christians.

ROGER

Some of us even drive cars. Government's got this program now. Trade your pony in for  
a car. Indians only though. Just one of the perks, the *benefits*, that comes with being  
Indian.

SARAH

He's joking.

BEN

Oh, ha.

ROGER

You know why the Cherokee hate snow?

BEN

Uh, it's cold and wet, and pretty miserable.

ROGER

It's white and covers all of our land.

WATIE

He's really proud of that one.

SARAH

Can you pass the potatoes?

FLORA

Ketchup?

FLORA passes her the ketchup. SARAH shakes the ketchup but nothing comes out.

SARAH

You know why the Cherokee love ketchup? It's red and no matter how hard you shake it, it refuses to move. It's permanently stuck.

BEN

(laughs awkwardly) That's a good one.

ROGER

How'd you propose to my daughter?

BEN

Well, you know, I asked her, I said, what's your favorite place on earth? And she told me the cemetery where her grandfathers are buried-

ROGER

You proposed to her in the cemetery?

BEN

No, no, I thought that would be weird.

FLORA

I think it'd be romantic.

ROGER

Where did you propose to my daughter?

Beat.

BEN

I asked her, you know after the cemetery, what's your next favorite place? And she said the Illinois. So I'm thinking, how do you propose to a girl in a river? And then I thought about it, and I realized, hey, I could propose to her in a canoe!

FLORA

You proposed to an Indian in a canoe?

BEN

So there we are, floating down the Illinois, and I've never been down the Illinois.

WATIE

People've died in that river. They've capsized, they've drowned-

BEN

Wish someone had told me before I decided to propose there. So there we are, I pull out the ring, and I tell her I have something I want to ask her. I'm lookin at her, upstream.

SARAH

And I'm look at him, downstream.

BEN

I show her the ring-

SARAH

And I'm screaming.

BEN

I'm thinking, huh, this isn't going well. And then suddenly the current picks up and I hear the roar. We turn sideways and slam into a rock. She goes flying, I go under. I hit my head on the canoe and I'm down there, stuck between the canoe and the rock, and I can't get up for air.

SARAH

For like ten seconds.

BEN

Which felt like an eternity. And when I finally manage to come up for air, I'm clutching the ring in my fist, I see the canoe 500 feet down the river and she's sitting on the shoreline. Laughing. Her hair dripping, covering her face.

ROGER

And you thought that was a good time to ask her?

SARAH

I said yes.

FLORA

“Yes I will marry you” or “Yes we didn’t die.”

SARAH

Both.

ROGER

So you gonna have kids?

SARAH and BEN look at one another.

SARAH

I think so, yes.

BEN

Yeah.

ROGER

(to BEN) They’ll be Cherokee Nation citizens?

BEN

(looks around for help) Can they? I don’t have any Indian blood.

ROGER

You don’t need Cherokee blood to be Cherokee. Just ask the freedmen.

SARAH

Dad.

BEN

Freedmen?

FLORA

Descendants of slaves. That the Cherokee owned.

BEN

Y’all owned slaves?

SARAH

We did.

BEN

We aren’t the only ones!

FLORA

They just won their court case.

WATIE

We signed a treaty with the United States, after the Civil War-

SARAH

And in that treaty, we agreed to grant citizenship to all former Cherokee slaves.

WATIE

Twenty years ago we amended our Constitution and dis-enrolled all of them.

SARAH

One of the most embarrassing moments of our history.

ROGER

They're not Cherokee.

SARAH

They walked the Trail of Tears-

ROGER

Is that what makes you Cherokee? Walking the Trail of Tears?

SARAH

Sovereignty isn't about race. It's about citizenship. And they're citizens. We signed a treaty!

BEN

And we know how you feel about treaties.

ROGER

(to BEN) What do you know about treaties?

BEN

I know your folks signed one. And then they were killed.

FLORA

By the Rosses.

SARAH

John Ross had nothing to do with the assassinations.

FLORA

His party killed more than 150 members of the Ridge Treaty Party-

SARAH

Members of his political party carried the murders out and he was only informed after-

FLORA

He knew. He knew that as soon as they made it to Oklahoma-

SARAH

Indian Territory. Oklahoma wasn't a state yet.

FLORA

He knew as soon as they got to *Indian Territory*, they planned to show up at John Ridge's house-

SARAH

It's a bit more complicated than that-

ROGER

Ross was a dictator.

FLORA

He canceled the elections.

ROGER

He shut down the paper.

FLORA

He ruled like a tyrant.

ROGER

(to BEN) And Rosses say that we, the Ridges, caused the Trail of Tears.

FLORA

(to BEN) And Rosses say that we, the Ridges, caused the Trail of Tears.

ROGER

(to BEN) When Cherokee Nation moved west, the Nation was paid 5 million dollars. You know where that money went? From the United States directly to Ross's brother. And that's how Lewis Ross became the first millionaire in Cherokee Nation. Everyone blames the Ridges for the Trail of Tears, but the Rosses profited from it. They made millions.

BEN

(to SARAH) Ross? That's who you work for, that's your boss?

SARAH nods yes.

ROGER

You work for a Ross?

SARAH

Jim Ross. In the Attorney General's Office.

ROGER

You never told me.

SARAH

You never asked.

WATIE

I've met him. He's a nice guy.

ROGER

I can't believe you're working for a Ross.

SARAH

Well I am.

FLORA

If it were me, I'd shoot him.

SARAH

Please don't say that.

ROGER

It's about time someone killed a Ross in Tahlequah.

SARAH

(to ROGER) Back to your question, our kids will be Cherokee because I'm Cherokee.

FLORA

Cherokees are matrilineal.

BEN

So kids follow the mother?

ROGER

You haven't even discussed this.

SARAH

We haven't gotten that far but-

ROGER

You have no idea if he'll agree to enroll your children as Cherokee Nation citizens?

SARAH

You don't give a shit about being Cherokee.

ROGER

I'm proud of who I am.

SARAH

Your idea of being Cherokee is sleeping under a Pendleton blanket and drinking out of a Cherokee Nation coffee mug.

WATIE

Sarah.

SARAH

He left. He left and he never came back. He never brought us back. We had to come back. On our own. Without him.

ROGER

I'm here now.

SARAH

Because I called you. Because I begged you, Daddy, please come back to Oklahoma, please Daddy, come back and walk me down the aisle.

ROGER

I wouldn't walk you down the frozen pizza aisle to meet this guy.

ROGER exits.

WATIE

Just because you finally decided to come home doesn't mean he has to.

WATIE exits, after his father.

SARAH

Ugh. The men in my family.

BEN

He'll change his mind.

FLORA

He's never changed his mind about anything.

SARAH

Seriously. What's his problem?

FLORA

You were disrespectful.

SARAH

Me? What about him?!

FLORA

He's sensitive. He's been through a lot.

SARAH

He's an asshole.

FLORA

True. But he's also your father.

TEN. 1832. Cherokee Nation. Major Ridge's home.  
JOHN RIDGE, MAJOR RIDGE, JOHN ROSS, and  
ELIAS BOUDINOT meet with the attorney, the former  
United States Attorney General **WILLIAM WIRT**.

**WILLIAM WIRT**

How is the Reverend?

JOHN RIDGE

In good spirits. They have him making cabinets.

JOHN ROSS

I thought he was sentenced to hard labor.

MAJOR RIDGE

(in Cherokee) *Making cabinets is hard, for a white man.*

JOHN RIDGE, ELIAS, and JOHN ROSS laugh.

**WILLIAM WIRT**

I beg your pardon?

ELIAS

Making cabinets is hard, for a white man.

JOHN RIDGE

My father means no offense.

JOHN ROSS

It's just our sense of humor.

**WILLIAM WIRT**

He understands English.

MAJOR RIDGE

Yes.

**WILLIAM WIRT**

But he can't speak it?

MAJOR RIDGE

(in Cherokee) *There are so many things I can say in Cherokee that I cannot say in English. I refuse to limit myself.*

JOHN RIDGE

There are so many things he can say in Cherokee that he can't say in English. He refuses to limit himself.

JOHN ROSS

(to WILLIAM WIRT) You plan to focus your argument on our treaties?

WILLIAM WIRT

They're very strong documents.

JOHN RIDGE

You have a list of all the treaties we've signed?

WILLIAM WIRT

Got it right here.

ELIAS

I think you start with Hopewell.

JOHN RIDGE

That treaty recognizes Cherokee Nation's sovereign right to exercise jurisdiction over all Cherokee lands.

WILLIAM WIRT

I plan to review it tonight.

JOHN RIDGE

And your Constitution makes clear that once a treaty is signed by your President and ratified by your Senate, it becomes the supreme law of the land.

ELIAS

So the law is on our side. They have no law.

WILLIAM WIRT

They have an audience. This President, and the Justices he appointed, they're all very sympathetic to the State.

JOHN RIDGE

But what about the law? The Court's decision must be based on the law, not sympathies.

**WILLIAM WIRT**

I must be honest with you. There's hardly a politician in Washington that isn't advocating for your removal. Did you know the State of Georgia has attempted to have my license to the bar revoked? For representing you. They have allies in Washington, and you do not.

**MAJOR RIDGE**

*(in Cherokee) This case isn't about a missionary. It isn't about his right to preach the Gospel on Cherokee lands against the Governor's wishes. This case is about our right to protect our citizens on our land. It's about our sovereignty.*

**WILLIAM WIRT** looks to JOHN RIDGE.

**JOHN RIDGE**

This case isn't about a missionary. It isn't about his right to preach the Gospel on Cherokee lands against the Governor's wishes. This case is about our right to protect our citizens on our land. It's about our sovereignty.

**WILLIAM WIRT**

All the same, I need to state something a bit more . . . Concrete. In the brief. I'll cite to your treaties-

**JOHN ROSS**

*(points to Major Ridge)* When he was born, the United States didn't exist. After winning the war, the first thing General Washington did was sign a treaty with the Delaware-Lenape. You see, fifty years ago, the whole world recognized the sovereignty of Indian Nations, but no one recognized the United States.

**JOHN RIDGE**

They used our sovereignty to establish the United States, and now they seek to destroy it.

**WILLIAM WIRT**

What is *sovereignty*?

**JOHN ROSS**

What is it to you?

**WILLIAM WIRT**

My good friend Webster, in his dictionary, defines "sovereignty" as "a country's independent authority and the right to govern itself." And I have cited that, in the brief I've begun to write-

**JOHN ROSS**

When we established our Supreme Court, that's sovereignty.

ELIAS

When Council votes on a resolution, that's sovereignty.

JOHN RIDGE

(in Cherokee) Sovereignty is when I speak my language.

WILLIAM WIRT looks to JOHN ROSS for the translation.

JOHN ROSS

Sovereignty is when I speak my language.

WILLIAM WIRT

That's . . . Provocative. I'm just not sure how to work it into the brief-

JOHN RIDGE hands him a drafted brief.

JOHN RIDGE

Don't worry, I've drafted it for you.

WILLIAM WIRT

Oh.

JOHN RIDGE

The brief starts with an analysis of Article II, Section 2, Clause 2 of your Constitution-

JOHN ROSS

John's an attorney.

WILLIAM WIRT

(to JOHN RIDGE) You practice law?

JOHN RIDGE

I studied it. But no court in the United States will allow me to practice it on account of my race.

JOHN ROSS

We can sign documents to sell our lands, but we can't speak on our own behalf when we ask your courts to enforce the agreements your Nation has signed with us.

WILLIAM WIRT

(to JOHN RIDGE) Thank you. I'm grateful for your help.

JOHN RIDGE

But you feel forced to accept it.

WILLIAM WIRT

You must forgive me. I didn't expect you to have prepared arguments based on *our* Constitution.

JOHN RIDGE

It's a very straightforward document.

JOHN ROSS

John, Elias, the Major, all of us are at your disposal. We'll help you in any way we can.

WILLIAM WIRT

Very well then.

JOHN ROSS

It's late.

WILLIAM WIRT

Yes and the trip was long-

JOHN RIDGE

We will resume tomorrow.

WILLIAM WIRT

Thank you.

MAJOR RIDGE

(in Cherokee) *I will escort you out.*

ELIAS

The Major will escort you.

WILLIAM WIRT

Goodnight gentlemen.

MAJOR RIDGE escorts WILLIAM WIRT off.

JOHN ROSS

(to JOHN RIDGE) I used to translate. For your father. Until you both came back from Cornwall. And then,

JOHN RIDGE

Your Cherokee is quite good.

JOHN ROSS

I didn't speak until I was 10. And even then, I only spoke in phrases.

JOHN RIDGE

I learned English when I was 12.

JOHN ROSS

Your English is excellent.

JOHN RIDGE

I've learned a lot from listening to you.

JOHN ROSS

I wanted to speak our language. When I was a boy. But every time I tried, my father scolded me. Speaking Cherokee was "uncivilized." So I spoke English. Until I met your father.

My father married a Cherokee woman, but somehow he never expected a Cherokee son.  
Goodnight.

JOHN ROSS exits.

ELIAS

You submitted a powerful brief.

JOHN RIDGE

We took your edits.

ELIAS

I saw that.

JOHN RIDGE

You have the uncanny ability to take cluttered sentences and re-organize them in the most compelling fashion.

ELIAS

I just removed a few words here and there. You're too verbose. But that's why you have me. Even the most brilliant mind needs an editor.

SARAH BIRD NORTHRUP enters.

JOHN RIDGE

Goodnight, Elias.

ELIAS nods and exits.

**SARAH BIRD NORTHRUP**

I pressed your suit. The one your father bought you for graduation. I fixed the tear in the seam from your last trip to Washington. And please John, watch what you put in your pockets. Pockets are for small items. Like handkerchiefs. Or combs. A key or two.

**JOHN RIDGE**

Notes from your wife?

**SARAH BIRD NORTHRUP**

Notes from your wife, yes. But not rocks. You can't put rocks in your pocket, no matter how interesting they look when you find them in your path.

**JOHN RIDGE**

What if I want to bring one home to you?

**SARAH BIRD NORTHRUP**

You're the most brilliant man I've ever met, but when it comes to common sense, Creator did not bless you.

**JOHN RIDGE**

Did you know that, in the history of the United States, no Indian Nation has ever won a case in your Supreme Court. Ever.

**SARAH BIRD NORTHRUP**

Maybe you'll be the first.

**ELEVEN** Early 2020. JIM ROSS sits in his office in Cherokee Nation (Oklahoma). SARAH joins him.

**SARAH**

Jury acquitted.

**JIM ROSS**

Oh, no.

**SARAH**

Defense impeached my key witness, my other witness recanted, and the Defendant came across as really reliable, trustworthy, the jury loved him.

**JIM ROSS**

I know you're disappointed.

SARAH

They're so good at that. The abusers we prosecute. Watie shows up at the scene, she's black and bruised, he's screaming, blood on his hands, and then you put her on the stand and she goes silent and you put him up there and the jury loves him.

JIM ROSS

Hey, (*points to ring*) when are you gonna tell me about this ring you've been flashing around? Congratulations.

SARAH

Oh, thank you.

JIM ROSS

Who's the lucky man?

SARAH

Ben. O'Connor.

JIM ROSS

Sarah O'Connor. Kinda has a ring to it.

SARAH

He's a cop. For the State.

JIM ROSS

Too bad your name isn't Sandra Day.

Beat.

JIM ROSS

OK so, we have to go back to DC. Tomorrow.

SARAH

To meet with the DOJ?

JIM ROSS

The President.

SARAH

Like, of the United States?

JIM ROSS

He has some questions about the legitimacy of tribal jurisdiction-

SARAH

Questions?

JIM ROSS

You may not be surprised to hear that this president isn't as supportive of tribal jurisdiction as the one you watched sign it into law in 2013.

SARAH

He wants to take away the jurisdiction Congress restored?

JIM ROSS

He's considering it.

SARAH

Congress passed VAWA. And he's the President, he can't just defy Congress. If he wants to change VAWA-

JIM ROSS

Let's not debate the constitutionality of what he wants, or thinks, he can do. Let's just help him understand jurisdiction. We'll have ten minutes with the President. I'm looking to you to tell me what to say.

JOHN ROSS exits.

**TWELVE** Later that night. SARAH joins BEN in their living room. Photos of cakes encompass SARAH and BEN. SARAH sits with her laptop open. BEN holds a sheet of paper with a form to fill out.

BEN

You OK?

SARAH

I feel nauseous.

BEN

You're anxious. You need to calm down.

SARAH

This is important. I can't make a mistake. What do you think of this sentence? "VAWA's restoration of Cherokee Nation's criminal jurisdiction is an important step to the full restoration of the jurisdiction preserved in the Treaty of New Echota." That's a reference to the treaty my grandfathers signed.

BEN

So Jim will delete it.

SARAH

Probably. Ugh.

BEN

Hey. (*holds out the cake options in front of her laptop*) Pick one.

SARAH

Oh. I don't know.

BEN

Chocolate or vanilla.

SARAH

Both.

BEN

Not an option.

SARAH

That's ridiculous.

BEN

You can have both, just not in the same cake.

SARAH

OK so two cakes.

BEN

We budgeted for one.

SARAH

You choose. I can't right now.

BEN

I got a call from the florist.

SARAH

Oh shit.

BEN

You still haven't put in the order for the flowers.

SARAH

What'd we decide? Yellow and turquoise?

BEN

You said you would choose.

SARAH

I think it was purple and turquoise-

BEN

And you said you would place the order three months ago.

SARAH

I'm really sorry. Oh, and I can't meet with the caterer tomorrow so you'll have to go alone.

BEN

Why?

SARAH

I have to go to D.C.

BEN

Again?

SARAH

I just found out today-

BEN

To do what?

SARAH

We're meeting with the President.

BEN

Who is "we"?

SARAH

What is this, 20 questions?

BEN

It will be if you refuse to give me an answer.

SARAH

I gave you an answer.

BEN

Who's going to DC?

SARAH

Me. And Jim.

BEN

I'll come too.

SARAH

It's not really that kind of a trip. We'll be working the whole time-

BEN

I can entertain myself. I won't bother you.

SARAH

I'll be gone and back in less than 36 hours.

BEN

I don't understand why you don't want me to come.

SARAH

I don't understand why you're making this such a big deal.

BEN

Because Jim's a jerk. He attacks your family constantly and you hate him. I don't want you alone in DC with him. I worry about you. On your own with him.

SARAH

I'll die before I let a Ross intimidate me.

BEN

I've been SVU for ten years, and sometimes, I can't explain it, I get this feeling. And with Jim, all I can say is, I don't trust him.

SARAH

But you trust *me*.

BEN

Tell him you can't go.

SARAH

We already got the plane tickets.

BEN

Tell him you're getting married.

SARAH

This is my job.

BEN

And I'm your fiance.

SARAH

I can't believe you would ask me to stay.

BEN

I'm not asking.

BEN exits. SARAH resumes typing on her laptop.

**THIRTEEN** 1832. Oval Office. JOHN RIDGE approaches ANDREW JACKSON. They acknowledge each other in silence.

JOHN RIDGE

If I'm correct, this is the first time an Indian Nation's ever won in your Supreme Court.

Beat.

JOHN RIDGE

I'm sure by now you've read Justice Marshall's decision.

JOHN RIDGE

(he reads from the copy of the decision he holds in his hand) "The Cherokee Nation then is a distinct community, occupying its own territory, with boundaries accurately described, in which the laws of Georgia can have no force"- this is what Justice Marshall has declared. Georgia has no jurisdiction over Cherokee lands.

ANDREW JACKSON continues to stare at him. JOHN RIDGE decides to continue.

JOHN RIDGE

As I'm sure you are aware, Georgia has refused to release Reverend Worcester. They continue to force him to undertake hard labor, despite the Court's decision compelling his release. Even worse, Georgia has begun to survey our land. They've created a lottery, and they're giving away Cherokee lands to Georgia citizens, in violation of Cherokee law.

Beat.

JOHN RIDGE

How do you plan to enforce the Supreme Court's decision? Georgia refuses to comply, and they won't, not without federal intervention.

Beat.

JOHN RIDGE

I've read your Constitution. I understand its meaning. As the President, you are constitutionally required to enforce the law of this land, and the Supreme Court has declared the law.

ANDREW JACKSON

John Marshall made his decision. Let him enforce it.

**ACT TWO- FOURTEEN** Two nights later. After SARAH has left for DC, on the night she is to return. MITCH and BEN sit at the casino bar, drinking beers.

BEN

She wants to push it back.

MITCH

When'd she say that?

BEN

Right before she left. Kissed me on the cheek and then said "I'm having second thoughts about April. How about September?" and she was out the door. September?

MITCH

People change their dates all the time.

BEN

I'm worried she changed her mind.

BEN raises his hand for another beer. **BARTENDER** serves MITCH and BEN another beer. They continue to drink.

MITCH

Only one way to find out.

BEN

Soooo, Sarah, seems like you don't want to marry me anymore?

MITCH

I wouldn't phrase it like that.

BEN

You're the lawyer. Tell me how to interrogate the witness.

MITCH

You're the cop. You know it's all about the evidence. You have to catch her in the moment. You know, when she's said or done something that undeniably shows she's questioning the marriage.

BEN

I'm such a fool.

MITCH

Everyone goes through this.

BEN

What made me think she was in love?

MITCH

What did she say when you popped the question?

BEN

She said yes. You think I'm forcing her to marry me?

MITCH

Did she say "oh my god yes!" Or "sure, why not." There's a difference. And did she have to think about it?

BEN

Jesus Mitch, she said "yes."

BEN notices a text on his phone.

BEN

She just landed.

MITCH

Be strong. Tell her the wedding date can't be pushed back and see how she responds. If she's not fully in, you wanna know now. Because when you get to the other side, it ain't pretty.

BEN

We haven't even married yet and you're already talking divorce.

MITCH

I do it for a living.

BEN flags down the **BARTENDER**.

BEN

One for the road. (*sees his phone again*) What the fuck.

MITCH

What?

BEN

She's getting a ride with Jim.

MITCH

Her boss?

BEN

"Don't need you to pick me up. Getting ride with Jim." (*to the bartender*) Hey, make that a Maker's Mark. On the rocks.

**BARTENDER** nods and attends to the drink.

MITCH

Hey man-

BEN

Every day Jim reminds Sarah that most of Cherokee Nation thinks her grandfathers are traitors because of some Treaty they signed. And then she comes home and cries to me. And I comfort her, I tell her, it's OK babe, Jim's a jerk. Be strong. You can do it. He's an asshole. And what does she do? She decides to postpone our wedding so she can go off to DC with Jim, the jerk.

BEN inhales his drink.

MITCH

Hey man, pace yourself.

BEN

Is this something Indian women do?

MITCH

I'm sorry?

BEN

Do they run around, you know? Like this.

MITCH

I'm not sure what you mean.

BEN

You kissed one. Did she turn around and kiss every other kid on the playground?

MITCH

I kissed Sarah.

BEN

What?

MITCH

I kissed Sarah and then I don't think she kissed anyone else in our class for years. I think I ruined it for her. She probably never wanted to kiss anyone until she kissed you.

BEN

You never told me you kissed my fiance.

MITCH

She wasn't your fiance when I kissed her. OK. That was fifth grade. We were kids.

BEN

So that's the only time you've kissed my fiance?

MITCH

You need to calm down.

BEN

You need to stop kissing my fiance and hiding it from me!

BEN grabs his coat and he's off.

MITCH

I don't think you should--BEN!

BEN is gone. MITCH exits.

**FIFTEEN** Moments later. SARAH and JIM ROSS open the door to Sarah and Ben's home. They step inside, JIM carries her suitcase.

SARAH

Ben?

She walks a bit further.

SARAH

Ben? (*to JIM ROSS*) Guess he's not here. Come on in.

JIM ROSS

Are you sure?

SARAH

It's raining.

JIM ROSS

I don't want to intrude.

SARAH

Ben won't care. I don't know where he is.

They stare at one another.

JIM ROSS

You're brilliant, you know that.

SARAH

Thanks.

JIM ROSS

Did I hear you tell the President your grandfathers were Treaty signers?

SARAH

Oh, yeah. I wanted him to understand the connection, that when I go to D.C., I follow in their footsteps.

JIM ROSS

Which treaty did they sign?

SARAH

I didn't realize how late it is.

JIM ROSS

Hopewell?

SARAH

We did circle the airport twice. Did you see the lightning in that storm?

JIM ROSS

Are you descended from Hicks?

SARAH

I'll get us some water.

JIM ROSS

OK come on. Who were your grandfathers?

BEN enters his home.

BEN

Jim.

JIM ROSS

Ben.

SARAH

I was wondering where you were.

BEN

I didn't expect to come home and find him standing in my kitchen.

SARAH

I invited him in.

JIM ROSS

I gave her a ride home.

BEN

Does that require you to enter my home?

SARAH

It's raining.

BEN

I noticed.

JIM ROSS

I'm gonna go ahead and leave now.

BEN

You sure you don't want to stay? You know, kiss my fiance?

SARAH

Are you drunk?

JIM ROSS

See you tomorrow.

SARAH

I'll be there.

BEN

Me too!

SARAH

Ben?

BEN

Oh, I'm not invited.

JIM ROSS

Goodnight.

BEN

Get the fuck out of my house.

JIM ROSS exits.

SARAH

So. We need to talk.

BEN

Yes, please, tell me, how was your time with *Jim*.

SARAH

I'm serious, Ben-

BEN

Did you have fun?

SARAH

I'm pregnant.

Beat.

SARAH

I missed my period, by a lot, and remember how I was so nauseous this past week? I went to a CVS in DC and got one of those kits, the test, and it came back positive.

Beat.

SARAH

I know it's not what we planned, I know we wanted to be married first, but we both said, we want to be parents, so . . . We are! We're going to have a baby!

BEN

You slept with Jim.

SARAH

What? No.

BEN slaps her across the face.

BEN

I'm your fiance, Sarah.

She steps back from him.

SARAH

You need to leave.

BEN

So you can be with Jim?

SARAH

You need to leave because you just hit me.

BEN

Sarah-

BEN presses his body against hers, pushing her up against the wall.

SARAH

You're hurting me.

SARAH tries to escape his hold.

BEN

Say you're sorry.

SARAH

Ben-

BEN

SAY YOU'RE SORRY.

SARAH spits in his face. He punches her squarely in the face and she falls to the ground.

He unzips his pants.

**SIXTEEN** Cherokee Nation, 1832. JOHN ROSS sits with ELIAS and MAJOR RIDGE in his home. JOHN RIDGE enters.

JOHN RIDGE

He says he won't enforce it.

Beat.

ELIAS

What do you mean?

JOHN RIDGE

He won't enforce the Supreme Court's decision.

ELIAS

But, he has to.

JOHN RIDGE

And I'm telling you he won't.

JOHN ROSS

He's their President.

JOHN RIDGE

He laughed at me.

MAJOR RIDGE

The Supreme Court is their highest court.

ELIAS

Did you visit our friends in Congress?

JOHN RIDGE

I met with Justices Marshall and McLean, our friends in Congress, I visited everyone we know in Washington.

JOHN ROSS

Congress will make him follow the Court.

JOHN RIDGE

No one will defy the President. They all say we should sign a treaty and move west.

JOHN ROSS

No. Never. Tell them we say never.

Beat.

JOHN RIDGE

I think we have no choice.

JOHN ROSS

We just won the right to remain on our lands and-

JOHN RIDGE

Every day, more and more are killed by the Georgia Guard-

JOHN ROSS

Our land is who we are. It's what makes us Cherokee.

JOHN RIDGE

What use will our land be once we've all been killed?

JOHN ROSS

We have a right to be here. This is our home.

JOHN RIDGE

And even their law won't prevent them from taking it from us.

I do not say this lightly. I haven't slept, ever since I met with the President. I see no other way for our Nation to survive.

If we agree to move west, we'll lose our lands, but we'll preserve the Nation. Intact.

JOHN ROSS

(to MAJOR RIDGE) He's turned against us. He's forsaken everything we stand for.

Beat.

JOHN ROSS

(to MAJOR RIDGE) Tell him he's wrong. Remind him what we agreed to. Years ago. You and I.

Beat.

JOHN ROSS

(to MAJOR RIDGE) I sat here at this table. I helped you draft the blood law. Anyone who sells Cherokee lands to the United States will be prosecuted and sentenced to death.

And we agreed. We promised each other. We will never leave. We will never sign a removal treaty. We will always stay.

MAJOR RIDGE

If we stay, we will only perish.

Beat.

JOHN ROSS

(to MAJOR RIDGE) There are consequences to what you say.

MAJOR RIDGE

I'm prepared to accept them.

ELIAS

He has a point, Georgia's outlawed our government, they rape our women, half our Nation is now homeless-

JOHN ROSS

And so you're ready to give up, let go, give it all away?

MAJOR RIDGE

Things have changed.

JOHN ROSS

The only thing that's changed is you.

As Principal Chief of Cherokee Nation, it is my job, it is my *duty*, to protect my people against those who seek to separate us from our lands. (to MAJOR RIDGE) Never, in a million years, did I think I would face the day when I would have to protect this Nation from you.

SARAH enters and approaches JOHN ROSS.

SARAH

(to JOHN ROSS) Sorry I'm late.

JOHN ROSS

(softens) It's fine-

SARAH

I know we have a training.

**SEVENTEEN.** The next day in 2020. Attorney General's Office, Cherokee Nation.

JIM ROSS

We've got four new prosecutors coming on board, and I was hoping you could speak to them. Two are fresh out of law school, but the two senior prosecutors are coming to us from the State. Should have a pretty good team here. . . . Look, I know you're a rockstar, but when you're in the office, maybe you can remove the shades. Don't want you to intimidate the new hires. They're kinda shy.

JIM takes off her sunglasses. Her eye is surrounded by a purple and blue bruise.

JIM ROSS

(with incredible concern) He did this?

She nods.

JIM ROSS

Are you safe?

She nods with ambivalence.

JIM ROSS

You have a place to stay?

SARAH

I have family.

JIM ROSS

Why don't you take some time off, you should-

SARAH

No.

JIM ROSS

Where'd he do this?

SARAH

My home.

JIM ROSS

That's, that's Cherokee Nation.

She nods.

JIM ROSS

We have jurisdiction.

She takes the shades back and puts them on.

SARAH

I want Cherokee Nation to prosecute.

**EIGHTEEN** New Echota, Cherokee Nation. 1832.  
ELIAS and JOHN RIDGE sit at the Cherokee Phoenix  
office, paper stretched out before them.

ELIAS

“John will be our next Chief, says the talking leaf.”

JOHN RIDGE

Which John?

ELIAS

Good point. Uh, “In a time of crisis, we will need a bridge. Vote for John Ridge.”

JOHN RIDGE

“Sovereignty First. John Ridge for Chief.”

ELIAS

That doesn't rhyme.

JOHN RIDGE

Does it need to?

ELIAS

It's not a slogan unless it rhymes. Such as, “he may look like a goat, but John Ridge  
deserves your vote.”

JOHN RIDGE

“Don't give John Ross your vote, he'll turn around and shove it down your throat.”

ELIAS

A bit aggressive.

JOHN RIDGE

I'm not convinced it has to rhyme. So long as it's clear I'm the Treaty Party candidate.

ELIAS

You've said nothing of John Walker.

JOHN RIDGE

I was with him last night.

ELIAS

When he was shot?

JOHN RIDGE

Before James Foreman shot him. On his way home. From Council.

ELIAS

The Ross Party wants to murder you. And me. And every member of the Treaty Party.

JOHN RIDGE

This is one killing.

ELIAS

They're sending a message! Anyone who advocates for removal will be killed.

JOHN RIDGE

We're more likely to be killed by a citizen of Georgia than one of Ross's crew.

ELIAS

Maybe we should slow down-

JOHN RIDGE

Slow down?

ELIAS

Take a step back-

JOHN RIDGE

And watch Georgia take our homes? Rape our women? Murder our families?

ELIAS

You need to think about how you campaign. That's all I'm saying. Not, "change your position"-- just think about how you communicate it. People are scared. They're terrified. They know we need to talk about it. But when you come out and say that if elected, the first thing you'll do is sign a treaty, people get defensive, they-

JOHN ROSS enters.

ELIAS

Morning, Chief.

JOHN ROSS

John, Elias, I want you to know elections have been canceled.

JOHN RIDGE

You can't do that.

JOHN ROSS

We're experiencing a constitutional crisis.

ELIAS

The Constitution calls for an election. Every four years.

JOHN ROSS

(to ELIAS) Tell me Elias, why are you printing articles advocating for Indian removal?

JOHN RIDGE

There are elected leaders of the Cherokee Nation who believe removal is the best course of action to preserve the Nation.

JOHN ROSS

Those leaders constitute a small, and I mean very small, minority. They do not speak for the Nation.

JOHN RIDGE

That's why you canceled the elections.

JOHN ROSS

We are under attack. From all sides.

ELIAS

You're opposed to discussing a removal treaty- .

JOHN ROSS

*Cherokee Nation* is opposed-

ELIAS

All the same, sir, I believe the power of a paper is its dissemination of all viewpoints. A paper does not tell people what or how to think.

JOHN ROSS

This paper is circulated across the entire United States.

ELIAS

A circulation I worked hard to cultivate.

JOHN ROSS

I will not have President Jackson reading anything that says there are Cherokees who favor removal. If you print another article advocating for removal, Council will suspend your funding.

ELIAS

You would fire me?

JOHN ROSS

Cherokee Nation tax dollars will not be spent securing the Nation's demise.

ELIAS

Then you must accept my resignation.

JOHN ROSS

That is your choice-

ELIAS

I have come to the unpleasant and most disagreeable conclusion that our lands, or a large part of them, are about to be seized and taken from us.

There is danger, immediate and appalling, and so it is my job, no it is my duty, to act consistently, give alarm, and tell our countrymen our true, or what I believe to be our true, situation.

JOHN ROSS

I accept your resignation.

Beat.

JOHN RIDGE

I hear they took your home. I heard that when you got back from your last trip to Washington, you found a white family living in your home.

JOHN ROSS

Georgia "granted" it to them.

JOHN RIDGE

That's why we must sign a treaty, they are taking our homes, but if we agree to move-

JOHN ROSS

We will never move.

JOHN RIDGE

Your wife and children were living in your storeroom. And paying rent. Just to live in the storeroom.

JOHN ROSS

Who are *you* to talk to me about family?

JOHN RIDGE

My father thought of you as his son.

JOHN ROSS

Tell your father that advocating for the sale of Cherokee lands is a crime punishable by death.

**NINETEEN** Late 2020. Tahlequah, Oklahoma. ROGER sits at Sarah's kitchen table, reading the Cherokee Phoenix.

ROGER

(*calls*) Is he asleep?

He returns to his paper. Then,

ROGER

(*louder*) Hey! Is he asleep?

SARAH enters, dressed for work. And late. She carries Baby Ridge.

SARAH

Yes, and don't yell. You'll wake him!

ROGER

Sorry.

SARAH

He was up at 4:30. Wouldn't go back to sleep until now.

ROGER

So he's cranky.

SARAH

He's a baby.

ROGER

You wrote everything down?

SARAH

It's all right here. (*points to a pad of paper on table*) I'm taking my breast pump with me.

ROGER

(*hands on ears*) I don't need to hear about you pumping your breasts.

SARAH

I'm a mother. It's what mothers do.

ROGER

And I'm your father. Please don't talk to me about it.

SARAH

There are three bottles in the fridge. That should get you through the day. You have my phone number-

ROGER

We'll be fine.

SARAH hands Baby Ridge to ROGER.

SARAH

My lunch break's at noon and-

ROGER

Go on now. You can't be late your first day back.

SARAH goes to exit. She stops.

SARAH

Dad. Thank you.

SARAH exits.

ROGER

(*holds Baby Ridge, asleep in his arms*) OK, first things first.

When you wake up, Mom's not gonna be here. And that, well, it might feel like a surprise. And you'll be like, who is this guy? He smells like cashews. And Lucky Strikes. But don't tell your mom I smoke. She thinks I stopped.

I'm your grandpa. You're my first grandkid. So, you know, I've never done this before. But I raised your mom. And your uncle. They think they had it rough. But me, shit, I was ten when I went to Chilocco. I know the slap you get for speaking your language, and I know the laugh, when someone's laughing at you 'cause of who you are.

Your mom named you Ridge. Ridge, *John* Ridge, was my mom's great grandfather. That's something to be proud of, he was a brilliant man, a fighter, his blood runs through your veins. Never forget that. Just don't tell anyone you're named after him. It's like, between you and me. Our little secret.

The day they find out you're a Ridge is the day they kill you.

**TWENTY** Late 2020. MITCH and BEN sit at the bar in the Hard Rock Casino, Catoosa Oklahoma.  
**BARTENDER** is present, but neither BEN nor MITCH ever request (or need) a refill.

MITCH

They've dismissed you from the force.

BEN

I have ten years of excellent service.

MITCH

And now you have a domestic violence conviction.

BEN

In a tribal court. You and I both know that doesn't count. You know who they put on my jury? Seven Indians, two black guys, and two, only two, white people. And they were both women! How is THAT a jury of my peers?

MITCH moves BEN's beer away from him.

MITCH

We need to focus. Next time, we meet in my office.

BEN

It's too far for me to drive-

MITCH

We can't have these conversations in a casino.

BEN

What's wrong with supporting the Cherokee Nation? I'm in their courts, I might as well be in their casino. (*he raises his beer*) To the Cherokee fucking Nation!

MITCH

We lost your habeas challenge.

BEN

In the Tenth Circuit?

MITCH

Decision came out this morning.

BEN

So we appeal to the Supreme Court.

MITCH

That's definitely an option, but-

BEN

Let's go all the way.

MITCH

Supreme Court's not gonna grant cert on a case like this.

BEN

Grant cert?

MITCH

Certiorari. Granting cert, it's lawyer speak for "agree to hear the case".

BEN

They "granted cert" in Dollar General's case-

MITCH

That resulted in a 4-4 tie-

BEN

And now there's a 9th Justice. Gorsuch will vote against tribal jurisdiction.

MITCH

I wouldn't be so sure about that-

BEN

We can pick up where Dollar General left off.

MITCH

You want me to argue that tribal jurisdiction, *any* tribal jurisdiction over American citizens is unconstitutional.

BEN

Uh, yeah. Because it is. Wait. Do you actually think tribal jurisdiction over me is constitutional?

MITCH

I think as an attorney I need to make the best argument possible for my client.

BEN

I'm asking you what you think. As my friend.

MITCH

You've asked me to be your attorney. That's very different. Let's focus on the argument.

BEN

Tribal jurisdiction over American citizens violates the Constitution.

MITCH

I'm gonna have to say a bit more than that. I'll start with *Oliphant*, and its justification. Explain that yes the Court did give Congress some discretion in administrating over Indian affairs, but that doesn't permit Congress to recognize a tribe's jurisdiction over non-Indians-

BEN

Because doing so violates the constitutional rights of individual Americans.

MITCH

Sure.

BEN

I mean, you can't tell me these courts are legitimate. Some elder climbs to the top of the mountain, smokes tobacco, comes back down with a decision. Seriously. What's that.

MITCH

You were tried before a jury, not on a mountaintop.

BEN

A jury full of Indians! How do you think they made their decision? I bet you they prayed.

MITCH

You need to let me do my job.

BEN

I'm the one coming up with all of the arguments.

MITCH

Your arguments aren't arguments. I'm an attorney.

BEN

You do family law.

MITCH

Yes, and what I say has to have some basis in the law.

WATIE enters, in uniform. He stops when he sees BEN and MITCH.

BEN

Look who it is.

WATIE turns around to leave, but stops when MITCH calls to him.

MITCH

I've tried calling you. I don't know if, maybe you didn't get my voicemails.

Beat.

MITCH

I'd really like to talk. Maybe not here, but maybe sometime we could get together-

WATIE

I have nothing to say to you.

MITCH

Everyone deserves an attorney. In fact, it's a constitutional right we all have that when we're accused of a crime, we get to have an attorney.

WATIE

Did you see the photos? Did you see what he did to her?

MITCH

I did.

WATIE

Ben didn't "mess up." This wasn't an "accident."

MITCH

He had too much to drink. He got angry, things got out of control.

WATIE

He's been sentenced to three years in jail.

BEN

We're appealing to the Supreme Court.

WATIE

(to BEN) You will pay for what you did.

BEN

Look man, I know some awful, like super awful, things have happened to you people over the last 500 years. The Trail of Tears. I get it. You're angry. But it's 2020. Time to let it go.

WATIE

(to MITCH) You're dead to me.

MITCH

He's my friend.

WATIE

And what is my sister?

MITCH

She's my friend too.

WATIE

That's funny. We both thought you were family.

WATIE exits.

MITCH

So, back to the discussion of your appeal.

BEN

You work on custody cases.

MITCH

Usually, yes.

BEN

Let's file for custody.

MITCH

I think we need to focus on the case we'll make now, to the Supreme Court-

BEN

Sarah'll drop the charges, if we file for custody. We could make a trade. She drops the charges, I drop the custody suit.

MITCH

Honestly, with a DV charge against you-

BEN

From a fake court!

MITCH

Just the same, it's a DV charge and no Judge is going to award you-

BEN

He's MY son. And I have a right to be a father to my son.

MITCH

You said he *wasn't* your son. You told me Jim got her pregnant.

BEN

That baby's mine.

MITCH

So you lied to me.

BEN

Have you looked at that baby? Blonde hair. He has my eyes. He's white. No way he's a real Cherokee. He's like, a *fraction* Cherokee.

MITCH

I'm withdrawing my representation of you.

BEN

The fuck, you can't do that!

MITCH

I'll help you find a new attorney. A public defender-

BEN

I should have known not to trust an attorney who's kissed opposing counsel.

MITCH

Sarah's a good person. I can't do this to her.

MITCH exits.

**BARTENDER**

(to BEN) I'm not Cherokee, so you know, what do I know. I just work for the Nation. But I serve a lot of guys a lot of booze, guys like you. Guys with money. Guys with no money. They sit at my bar and I make their drinks. And I listen. To what they say. And when they talk about how it's time for the Indians, for the Cherokee who are still here today to just "get over it," and "let it go," I wonder, when are *you* gonna let it go? When will guys like you get over it? Andrew Jackson lost. The Cherokee are still here. And as to me, well, I hope they always will be.



**TWENTY ONE** May 2021. SARAH sits in her office, working. JIM ROSS enters.

JIM ROSS

The Supreme Court granted cert.

Silence.

JIM ROSS

His brief is due in 30 days. We have 60.

More silence.

JIM ROSS

I know this is bad news.

SARAH

He's arguing that the exercise of tribal jurisdiction over non-Indians violates the United States Constitution.

JIM ROSS

His petition cites *Oliphant*. Like 29 times.

SARAH

He didn't know that case existed until I told him.

JIM ROSS

It's a good case for him.

SARAH

He knows how I feel about *Oliphant*!

JIM ROSS

That's why he's using it. Against you. And he got the attorney, the same attorney who represented Dollar General in the Supreme Court-

SARAH

The attorney who argued that no Tribe should be able to exercise jurisdiction over a non-Indian who sexually assaults an Indian child on tribal lands?

JIM ROSS

That's the one. He's a very distinguished Supreme Court litigator-

SARAH

We should drop the charges. Against Ben.

JIM ROSS

You mean, like, let him go?

SARAH

If we drop the charges, if we let him go, his constitutional claims will be moot and there won't be anything for the Supreme Court to decide.

JIM ROSS

We've worked so hard for this-

SARAH

We could lose our jurisdiction. The Court could say tribal jurisdiction over non-Indians is unconstitutional.

JIM ROSS

Or the Court could say it IS constitutional.

SARAH

Name me one time that's ever happened.

JIM ROSS

*Worcester v. Georgia.*

SARAH

Right. And then almost 150 years later, the Court decided *Oliphant*.

JIM ROSS

*Worcester* has never been declared bad law. It's still good precedent.

SARAH

To historians, maybe.

JIM ROSS

To me. Look, I know this is personal to you. Deeply personal. But this case is personal to me too. To most Cherokees, *Worcester* is a great case that we won. To me, it's a responsibility. A duty. An obligation. It's my grandfather's legacy. And nothing, not even *Oliphant*, can erase what Justice Marshall wrote in *Worcester*. My goal is to make the Court recognize that.

SARAH

And what if they don't?

Beat.

JIM ROSS

This is your decision to make. Just, think about it.

**TWENTY TWO** May 2021. WATIE and FLORA sit on the couch, watching T.V. ROGER enters carrying baby Ridge, in SARAH's apartment.

ROGER

(he tells the Cherokee creation story to baby Ridge, in Cherokee) *At first the earth was flat, soft and wet. The animals grew tired of waiting.*

ROGER stops when he sees WATIE and FLORA.

ROGER

I'm telling him a story.

WATIE

Didn't mean to interrupt.

ROGER

(back to English) No one even knows how long they had been there, but they were anxious to get down from the sky vault so they sent different birds out to see if it was dry.

WATIE sits on the couch and turns the T.V. on. FLORA leans over ROGER's shoulder to speak to Baby Ridge.

FLORA

But there was no place to land so they all came back to Galvladi to wait some more. Finally, it seemed the Earth might be dry enough but they still weren't sure-

WATIE

That was a poop.

ROGER

What? No.

WATIE

He pooped.

FLORA

I heard it.

ROGER

He's passing gas.

FLORA

Give it three minutes, and you'll smell the shit in that baby's diaper.

ROGER

You wanna change it?

WATIE

(to ROGER) You're the babysitter.

ROGER

(to WATIE) You're the uncle.

FLORA

There are responsibilities that come with being an uncle.

WATIE

Changing diapers isn't one of them.

SARAH enters.

ROGER

So they sent out the Great Buzzard to go and see if it was ready for them all to come down.

(to SARAH) He just woke up.

SARAH

(takes BABY RIDGE) Oh. Did you? Baby Ridge, my baby boy. (*smells his diaper*) Oh. Geez. You guys didn't smell that?

ROGER

Smell what?

SARAH

He pooped.

ROGER

I guess babies do that.

SARAH

Where's the diaper bag?

WATIE

Kitchen.

FLORA

I'll get it.

FLORA exits, taking BABY RIDGE with her.

WATIE

Hey so, I got a call from Jim today. He says I need to talk to you-

SARAH

I've decided to drop the charges.

ROGER

What?

SARAH

I told Jim we should let Ben go.

WATIE

After what he did to you?

SARAH

If we lose this case, we lose our jurisdiction. I'm not willing to risk that.

WATIE

Flora!

FLORA

(from offstage) What?

ROGER

(to SARAH) You can't drop this case.

SARAH

I can if I want to-

WATIE

FLORA!

SARAH

This is MY decision-

WATIE

Flora seriously get in here-

FLORA returns with a clean baby Ridge.

FLORA

What's all this screamin' about?

WATIE

Sarah told Jim to release Ben. To drop the charges.

FLORA

Is that true?

SARAH

Yes.

ROGER

She can't do that.

SARAH

I can if I want to-

WATIE

Tell her she has to call Jim right now-

SARAH

Watie!

WATIE

Let him know no way will she ever agree to drop the charges-

SARAH

But out! This isn't about you.

WATIE

You're my sister.

SARAH

We're dropping the charges.

ROGER

Why?

SARAH

If we take this to the Court, and we lose, the Nation loses. And then we have another Ridge who fought to save the sovereignty of our Nation and lost.

December 29, 1835. JOHN RIDGE enters and approaches FLORA, holding the baby. FLORA follows JOHN RIDGE into their moment.

JOHN RIDGE

I'm headed over to Elias's house.

FLORA/SARAH (BIRD NORTHRUP)

It's going to snow.

JOHN RIDGE

I have my coat.

SARAH (BIRD NORTHRUP)

Why don't you go tomorrow?

JOHN RIDGE

Reverend Schermerhorn's here. They're waiting for me.

SARAH (BIRD NORTHRUP)

John Ross said yes?

JOHN RIDGE

He said no.

SARAH (BIRD NORTHRUP)

So you're . . .

JOHN RIDGE

Going to sign without him.

Beat.

JOHN RIDGE

When I asked you to marry me, I knew I was asking you to leave your home. I never thought I'd ask you to leave mine.

I'm not afraid of death.

SARAH (BIRD NORTHRUP)

Don't talk like that.

JOHN RIDGE

If something should happen, promise me, I won't be left somewhere, buried alone. Without you. Promise me we'll always be together.

SARAH (BIRD NORTHRUP)

I promise.

JOHN RIDGE

I never wanted to make this choice. Between my family and my Nation.

SARAH (BIRD NORTHRUP)

Our children are Cherokee Nation citizens. Your family is your Nation.

JOHN RIDGE embraces her. HE exits.

ROGER

I told you, don't go back.

FLORA joins the Ridge/Polsons.

ROGER, FLORA, WATIE

*If you do, they'll kill you.*

ROGER

That's what my mom told me.

FLORA

It's what her dad told her.

ROGER

The one time I did go back, I was 19, unemployed and needed a job. I walked into the employment office and handed the woman there my card, she looked at me with judgment. "Are you still ostracized for what your grandfathers did?"

So I said to her, all they ever did was fight to save the Nation. Your Nation. My Nation. And what did they get in return? My grandfather was stabbed. 48 times in front of his wife and children. She laughed. She laughed. So I left. Walked right out. I never came back.

SARAH

I can't do anything that would make my baby an exile in his own Nation.

ROGER

So quit the case.

WATIE

Dad-

ROGER

Cancel the appeal.

WATIE

Don't listen to him.

ROGER

This is her choice, not yours, not mine-

FLORA

There's a reason the Georgia Guard instructed its men to rape our women. We, Cherokee women, we're the foundation of our Nation. We give birth to the next generation of citizens.

Without us, Cherokee Nation ceases to be sovereign. They know that. They've always known that. So, do whatever lawyerly thing you think is best. What the hell do I know, I'm no lawyer. But I am Ridge. And so are you. You were born to fight in the Supreme Court.

**TWENTY THREE** Late May 2021. SARAH sits, working at her desk. JIM ROSS enters, carrying a form. He places the form on Sarah's desk.

SARAH

What's this?

JIM ROSS

Ben's release. We just need your signature, on the dismissal-

SARAH

Don't drop the charges.

JIM ROSS

Wait, you don't-

SARAH

I changed my mind.

JIM ROSS

OK.

SARAH

Did you change yours?

JIM ROSS

I've thought about this. And if we press forward, in the Supreme Court, if we take it to that level, the media, they will fight you. They'll make it personal-

SARAH

It is personal.

JIM ROSS

You're Native. And you're accusing a white man of rape.

SARAH

That's why I have to fight this. If he can erase my sovereignty over my body, he can erase the sovereignty of my Nation.

JIM ROSS

I want you to do the argument.

SARAH

What?

JIM ROSS

In the Supreme Court.

SARAH

I've never argued in the Supreme Court.

JIM ROSS

You have to start sometime.

SARAH

There's a lot riding on this case.

JIM ROSS

And we need someone who understands that.

SARAH

You don't know me.

JIM ROSS

I know you're brilliant-

SARAH

But you don't know who I am.

JIM ROSS

If you don't want to do it, I won't make you.

SARAH

I want to do it.

JIM ROSS

Then what's your problem?

SARAH

I'm a Ridge.

JIM ROSS

Ridge. Like . . .

SARAH

John Ridge.

JIM ROSS

Like John Ridge. Wow.

SARAH

He is my grandmother's great-grandfather. I'm a direct descendant. I should have told you. A long time ago, I know. But then you wouldn't have hired me. Or maybe you would have fired me. And what am I supposed to say? I am who I am. I can't change that.

Beat.

SARAH

Say something. Anything. Please, don't just stand there.

JIM ROSS

John Ridge betrayed our Nation. He signed the treaty.

SARAH

To save Cherokee Nation-

JIM ROSS

My grandfather, John Ross, he was the Chief of Cherokee Nation. John Ridge wasn't elected-

SARAH

Because Ross canceled the elections. He wouldn't let John Ridge run.

JIM ROSS

I was taught, you know, growing up-

SARAH

To disrespect him.

JIM ROSS

I don't know him.

SARAH

But you judge him.

JIM ROSS

He paid the price. For what he did.

SARAH

You think he deserved it.

JIM ROSS

He signed the treaty.

SARAH

So you hate him.

JIM ROSS

I didn't say I *hate* him-

SARAH

You can't hate him and respect me.

JIM ROSS

I respect you, Sarah-

SARAH

His blood runs through my veins!

Beat.

JIM ROSS

John Ridge betrayed our Nation. You think he saved it. We won't resolve this in a day, or a month or even a year. But we have something now, something just as, if not more, pressing before us. So could we, maybe just this once, leave all that behind us and fight for what both of our grandfathers fought for, and that is, the sovereignty of Cherokee Nation? I'm asking you, Sarah Polson-

SARAH

Sarah *Ridge* Polson.

JIM ROSS

Sarah Ridge Polson, will you argue on behalf of the Cherokee Nation in the United States Supreme Court?

SARAH

Yes.

**TWENTY FOUR** Elias's home. New Echota, Cherokee Nation, December 29, 1835. JOHN RIDGE enters and finds ELIAS. SARAH RIDGE POLSON watches.

MAJOR RIDGE enters with REVEREND SCHERMERHORN, who carries and lays out the Treaty of New Echota on the table before them. SARAH RIDGE POLSON watches.

MAJOR RIDGE

(to JOHN) We're ready to sign.

They study the treaty.

MAJOR RIDGE

(in Cherokee) *Where is the provision on jurisdiction?*

JOHN RIDGE

My father won't sign this treaty unless it preserves our exclusive jurisdiction over Cherokee lands-

**REVEREND SCHERMERHORN**

Article 5.

JOHN RIDGE

"the lands ceded to the Cherokee nation in the forgoing article shall, in no future time without their consent, be included within the territorial limits or jurisdiction of any State or Territory"-

ELIAS

We will maintain exclusive jurisdiction over our lands?

**REVEREND SCHERMERHORN**

Yes.

MAJOR RIDGE

(in Cherokee) *We discussed a representative in Congress.*

ELIAS

Our representative, in Congress-

**REVEREND SCHERMERHORN**

Article 7. Cherokee Nation "shall be entitled to a delegate in the House of Representatives of the United States." I promise you, everything we discussed. It's in there.

ELIAS points and MAJOR RIDGE nods as they continue to read the treaty.

**REVEREND SCHERMERHORN**

(watching the Cherokee with great anxiety) Sure is cold out there. Maybe it'll be warmer where you go. I don't know. Never been there. Government's never sent me that way, they always send me here.

JOHN RIDGE, MAJOR RIDGE, and ELIAS reach agreement. They nod and begin to, one by one, sign.

**REVEREND SCHERMERHORN**

Maybe you'll grow corn out there. I got to see your Green Corn dance once when I was down here. I can't say I fully understood it.

ELIAS hands JOHN RIDGE the quill.

**REVEREND SCHERMERHORN**

Just waiting for you John!

JOHN RIDGE signs the Treaty.

**REVEREND SCHERMERHORN**

(takes up the treaty) Feels good to finally get it signed, right? After all these years of negotiations. Must feel good to just be done with it. Weight off your shoulders.

**MAJOR RIDGE**

(in Cherokee) *I just signed my death warrant.*

**REVEREND SCHERMERHORN**

What did the Major say?

**ELIAS**

I just signed my death warrant.

**REVEREND SCHERMERHORN**

I'll transport this to Washington immediately.

The **REVEREND** exits. MAJOR RIDGE puts his hand on his son's shoulder.

**ELIAS**

What is a man who will not dare to die for his people?

**JOHN RIDGE**

Who is there here that will not perish, if this great Nation may be saved?

ELIAS sings *Amazing Grace*, in Cherokee.

**TWENTY FIVE** The United States Supreme Court. Oral argument. SARAH enters. October 2021.

**SARAH (RIDGE POLSON)**

Good morning. Sarah Ridge Polson for the Cherokee Nation. May it please the Court. 180 years ago, my great-great-great grandfather served as Speaker of the Cherokee Nation Council that established the Cherokee Nation Supreme Court. We opened our Supreme Court in 1825, twenty years before the State of Georgia opened its own.

At that time, like today, our Cherokee women were raped and assaulted by non-Natives who visited, and lived on, Cherokee lands. At that time, like today, Cherokee Nation passed a law criminalizing the rape of women on Cherokee lands. And Cherokee Nation prosecuted perpetrators regardless of whether they were Indian or not. If you raped a woman on Cherokee lands, you would be prosecuted by Cherokee Nation.

In 1832, Georgia fought Cherokee Nation's jurisdiction. In response, this Court declared Cherokee Nation's jurisdiction to be both exclusive and inherent. In *Worcester v. Georgia*, this Court upheld the inherent right of Indian Nations to protect their citizens.

President Jackson, however, refused to enforce the Court's decision. Instead, he openly defied it, and in 1837, Jackson stacked this Court with Justices he felt would abide his mission to erase tribal jurisdiction, and ultimately, Tribal Nations.

Andrew Jackson's policies, unfortunately, lasted long after his life. Jackson's fight to eliminate tribal jurisdiction culminated in 1978, when this Court declared that Tribal Nations were no longer able to exercise jurisdiction over non-Indians who commit crimes on tribal lands. Following this Court's decision in *Oliphant*, rates of non-Indian violence against Native women on tribal lands skyrocketed, as non-Indian offenders realized Tribal Governments were now without the authority to prosecute them for their criminal behavior. Today Native women face rates of domestic violence and sexual assault higher than any other population in the United States. It took 140 years to fully come into effect, but Andrew Jackson's campaign to eliminate tribal jurisdiction has reaped devastating, life-and death consequences for Native women.

Like the arguments Georgia and President Jackson used to support the forced removal of Cherokee Nation, Petitioner's arguments are based on a prejudicial view that Tribal Governments, Tribal Courts, Tribal Constitutions, and the entirety of tribal law must be inferior to the law created and enforced by the States and the Federal Government.

But we're not. Nothing about us, or our governments, is inferior. Petitioner's arguments that Indian Nations cannot exercise jurisdiction over non-Indians finds no support in the Constitution. Tribal jurisdiction over non-Indians pre-dates the United States Constitution. So tribal jurisdiction isn't unconstitutional. It's preconstitutional.

And no sovereign, not even the United States, can strip my Nation of its inherent right to protect me and my fellow Cherokee women. Thank you. Wado.

**TWENTY SIX** JOHN RIDGE arrives at the Hermitage. 1838. ANDREW JACKSON has two pies on the coffee table before him.

ANDREW JACKSON

Can I offer you some pie?

JOHN RIDGE

I'm not hungry.

ANDREW JACKSON

You have to be, traveling so far. How many days since you left Georgia?

JOHN RIDGE

I left *Cherokee Nation* the first of May.

ANDREW JACKSON

Got apple and pumpkin. Take your pick.

JOHN RIDGE

There are thousands who refuse to leave. They've been informed of the treaty, but Ross told them not to leave. He's told the entire Nation the treaty is illegitimate and the federal government cannot require them to leave.

ANDREW JACKSON

(helps himself to a piece) I prefer apple myself. Never much liked pumpkin.

JOHN RIDGE

I realize you're no longer in the White House, but perhaps you could speak to the current administration and impress upon them that the Cherokee cannot be forced to move at gunpoint. If the United States does that, there will be deaths-

ANDREW JACKSON

This here, this is my wife's recipe. Thank God she taught the help before she passed. I do not know what I would do if I had to continue without her apple pie. Losing her was bad enough. Now, your wife is white, correct?

JOHN RIDGE

She's from Cornwall, Connecticut.

ANDREW JACKSON

Your children are half Cherokee.

JOHN RIDGE

My children are not fractions. They're citizens. Of a sovereign nation. Cherokee Nation.

ANDREW JACKSON

Hmm. Sometimes I have to wonder, how many times can you cut an apple pie before it's no longer apple.

He cuts another piece of apple pie.

ANDREW JACKSON

I mean, this, this piece here, this is apple pie.

He places it in the one empty slot where a piece of pumpkin pie had previously been cut and eaten.

ANDREW JACKSON

But when I place it here, what is this? I think most people would say this pie is pumpkin. There is of course, a piece of apple. Just a tiny sliver. A mere fraction. (*holds up the pumpkin pie*) What would you say? Would you say this is pie is apple? (*puts the pie down*) If I ate the whole pie, I'd hardly taste the apple. I'd only taste the pumpkin. (*with knife in hand, slices remainder of apple pie*) Pretty soon there will be nothing left of your race other than a handful of Americans who claim to be a fraction of who you are. It's inevitable. Someday, this country will lose its Indian flavor.

He takes a bite of pie.

**TWENTY SEVEN** The darkness of night in the POLSON CEMETERY. With a shovel in hand and a kerosene lamp to light the ground, SARAH BIRD NORTHRUP digs furiously. SAMUEL WORCESTER enters. June 22, 1839.

SAMUEL WORCESTER

What are you doing?

SARAH (BIRD NORTHRUP)

Digging.

SAMUEL WORCESTER

In the middle of the night?

SARAH (BIRD NORTHRUP)

I have to bury him. I have to bury him before they come back and kill all of us.

SAMUEL WORCESTER

They killed John.

SARAH (BIRD NORTHRUP)

(she moves the lamp to reveal his bloodied body) Dragged him out of bed this morning. Twelve men. Stabbed him, who knows how many times. In our yard. In front of my children. I have children. Five children.

Hiding in the cellar, because I am scared they are going to come back and kill my babies. And where the hell have you been? Where's Elias? Major Ridge? WHY AM I ALONE?

SAMUEL WORCESTER

They're dead . . . They shot the Major, he was riding horseback, they shot him as he crossed the creek into Cherokee Nation. And this morning, Elias and I were working on my roof. Two men came and asked Elias for medicine. In Cherokee. So he got down off the roof to help them, and they, they took a hatchet to his head. Cut his skull in two. I saw it all from my roof.

SARAH (BIRD NORTHRUP)

My children, I have to take them away from here. I have to leave.

SAMUEL WORCESTER

Where will you go?

SARAH (BIRD NORTHRUP)

Arkansas?

SAMUEL WORCESTER

You should leave now. Before sunrise. So no one sees you.

Same scene, JIM ROSS enters the same cemetery, carrying Baby Ridge. He stands next to SARAH (BIRD NORTHRUP).

JIM ROSS

This here, this is your great, great, maybe another great, grandfather, John Ridge-

SARAH (BIRD NORTHRUP)

I promised him I wouldn't leave him. I told him he'd never be alone.

SARAH (RIDGE POLSON) enters.

SARAH (RIDGE POLSON)

I can't find the diaper bag.

JIM ROSS

I just changed him. He's fine.

SARAH (RIDGE POLSON)

Oh. What are you doing?

JIM ROSS

Introducing him to his relatives.

SAMUEL WORCESTER

Let me bury him.

SARAH (RIDGE POLSON) takes JIM ROSS's hand.

JIM ROSS

(to Baby Ridge) Your grandfather John Ridge fought to save the sovereignty of Cherokee Nation.

SARAH (RIDGE POLSON)

Will you mark his grave?

SAMUEL WORCESTER nods.

JIM ROSS

And he won his case. In the Supreme Court. Just like your mom.

SARAH (BIRD NORTHRUP)

Someday, my children will return.

SARAH (RIDGE POLSON)

(*to Baby Ridge*) Your name is Ridge.

SARAH (BIRD NORTHRUP)

I want them to find him (*kneels next to JOHN's body*).

JIM ROSS

You were born with sovereignty in your blood.

THE END.